Outside The Circle: The Juxtaposition Of Powwow Imagery And Cherokee Historical Representation

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OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE:
THE JUXTAPOSITION OF POWWOW IMAGERY
AND CHEROKEE HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2009
ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the juxtaposition presented by the Eastern Cherokee’s struggle to present an accurate historical representation of ‘Cherokee’ against the backdrop of the more lucrative ‘Tourist-ready Indian’, influenced by powwow imagery. The thesis gives a brief history of the contemporary powwow, discusses the debates surrounding its intrinsic value to American Indians as historically representative, and then examines the shared elements of Cherokee and powwow history. There is an analysis of the influence of powwow imagery on notions of Cherokee history and its correlation to the expectations of visitors to the Cherokee Reservation. Thus, the author argues that the Eastern Cherokee struggle to accurately transmit their own historical identity outside of powwow imagery, and in doing so, must reconcile the dichotomous relationship of a viable tourist industry that operates on historical misconceptions.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To all American Indians who so graciously shared time, thoughts and insights - I am forever in your debt.

My children have graciously done without a mother many times so I could be a student.

My husband has been my most avid supporter - my theories and ideas were improved through countless conversations with him.

Thank you all.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It surprises many people that there are American Indians alive and well in this country. They are even more surprised to learn that they do not look like, dress like, or act like the Indians of the Hollywood western movies. Most historical textbooks used in America’s school system give little or no space to Indians or Indian contributions to the larger American historical picture. Yet had America been unoccupied, the first Europeans would have died from lack of food, shelter and medicine and there would have been no cooperative exchange in agriculture between the first inhabitants and the new arrivals to the continent. Today, the federal government recognizes many American Indian tribes, each with its own history and contributions to the American national identity.

Many of these Indian people occupy the southeastern part of the United States. Yet, as in the larger picture of American History, the historiography of the South tends to lean toward recurring themes, such as Spanish exploration, agrarianism, slavery, and the Civil War, inadvertently marginalizing American Indian contributions to the history of the South. North Carolina has more Indian people living within its borders than any other state in the Southeast. Within this population, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians number slightly over 13,000. They have their own distinct history and well-defined land base. The Cherokee Reservation, also known as the Qualla Boundary, is recognized by the federal government as sovereign.

Yet remaining distinctly Cherokee has not been easy for the Cherokee people. Exerting tribal identity and history, when neighbored by a dominant non-Indian society
immediately outside the boundaries of the reservation, is problematic. Exacerbating this problem is the industry of tourism. The Cherokee Reservation is one of the most commercialized and visited reservation in America. Thus, the Cherokee people find themselves catering to a public concept that presents American Indians within the model projected by Hollywood – the noble savage, with copper skin and jet-black hair, resplendent with feathered war bonnets, face paint and loin cloths.

While visiting the Oconaluftee River Park in downtown Cherokee, I observed the following event which helps to illustrate this dilemma.

The park was crowded with people this particular day, enjoying the river and warm breezes. Near me were Cherokee Indian people I had met earlier that week so we talked some as we were eating our lunch on the park bench. All of us were dressed in shorts and flip flops necessitated by the typically warm weather of June. Keeping a watchful eye on the rain clouds above, we commented on the steady stream of traffic moving on both sides of the street and wondered what people expected to see when they came to the reservation. Deciding to leave before the rain came, I said goodbye and gathered my trash. Just then a tourist weighted down with shopping bags, rushed toward us. “Hey, hold up there,” he called out to us. As he approached he moaned, “I have been on this reservation all day and haven’t seen a real Indian yet. Do you know where I could find one?” I stared at the tourist in disbelief and then looked at my Cherokee Indian friend, waiting for his reply. Without blinking an eye, he calmly replies, “Nope, I haven’t seen one either.” Once the disappointed tourist had walked away, he said with typical Cherokee humor, “You can never find an Indian when you need one!”

1
This story illustrates the stereotypical view of American Indians so widely embraced by the general public and raises the question central to this thesis. How do Eastern Cherokee reconcile their own history and identity against the backdrop of the more lucrative ‘tourist-ready Indian’ – the ‘real’ Indian of the Western Frontier, who wears a war bonnet and a buckskin loincloth?

As the powwow is considered the cultural icon that most vividly epitomizes the popular notion of ‘Indian’, this paper discusses the influence of powwow imagery on Cherokee historical representation. This thesis gives a brief history of the contemporary powwow and discusses the scholarly debates surrounding its intrinsic value to American Indian identity. The appearance of the Eastern Cherokee tribe-sponsored powwow and the historic significance behind the event is examined. There is an analysis of the influence of powwow imagery on popular notions of Cherokee history and its correlation to the expectations of visitors to the Cherokee Reservation. Finally, the thesis looks at what the Cherokee people deem important to the historical representation of themselves as “Cherokee”. Thus, the author argues that the Eastern Cherokee struggle to transmit their own historical identity outside of powwow imagery, and in doing so, must reconcile the dichotomous relationship of a viable, yet often contrary, tourist industry. The thesis begins with a brief discussion on powwow history and its connection to American Indian identity.
Powwow History

The core of any American Indian group’s identity is its history and culture. Over the past 50 years, the powwow is seen as the most visual representation of that native history. In the last decade alone, there has been an unprecedented number of new powwows (relative to older powwows like the 128th Annual Afraid of His Horse Powwow in South Dakota or the 90th Annual Meskwaki Indian Powwow in Iowa) listed in numerous publications and internet sites inviting spectators and participants, dancers and drum. There are many powwows offered on any given weekend in any state. There are numerous powwow circuits to which one can subscribe at will as either a spectator or participant that offer consecutive powwows in close regional proximity to each other. The persistence of powwows throughout history, even in these modern times of a lagging economy, suggests its importance to many Indian people and its popularity with non-Indians.

The word *powwow* comes from the more recent past and did not originally mean what it does today. The word *puau* is commonly believed to come from the Algonquian language meaning a gathering of medicine men and spiritual leaders in a curing ceremony. Early explorers were supposed to have witnessed these spiritual events and assumed the term was indicative of any Indian gathering. Over time, it became anglicized to *powwow* and has long since been accepted by Indians as the entitlement for this type of celebration.²

According to the writings of Jacques Cartier, in 1534, while exploring what is now known as the St. Lawrence River, he observed seven canoes full of what he termed
“wild men” dancing and making signs of “joy and mirth, as it were desiring our friendship” and that the women along the shore were singing and dancing. This is the first known written observation of song and dance as a form of celebration in America. A very early account of an actual organized gathering of celebration that included dancing and singing was noted by the French explorer, Samuel Champlain in 1605. In the northern area of what is now Massachusetts, Champlain met with a group of native people. After the giving of gifts to one another, they “continued all day and all night celebrating with dance and song.”

It is a common belief among many native people that their songs and dances were given to them by the Creator, and therefore, as old as life itself. Given the abundance of historical descriptions and archaeological evidence that place native people on this continent many thousands of years prior to European contact, it is not unreasonable to assume that American Indian dance and songs have a history as ancient as the people themselves. Indeed, it is ancient warrior dances and songs, in the performative aspect that sets the stage for the contemporary powwow.

The origins of these early dances are found in the northern and southwestern Plains warrior societies, according to Clyde Ellis, Gloria Alese Young and Thomas W. Kavanagh. Ellis, in his work of powwow history and Southern Plains powwow culture, says that it is from the early ethno-historical accounts of various Plains warrior societies, such as the Omaha, Eastern Dakota, Plains Shoshone, and Crow Indians, that the connection to the contemporary powwow can be seen. The warrior societies and warrior dances, venerating the bravery and skill of its members as shared by Plains Indians
“suggests a Pan-tribal ethic based on common values and ideals that came to characterize the contemporary powwow,” says Ellis.⁴

Young, whose dissertation on Oklahoma powwows has provided the standard for scholarly inquiry into powwows over the last twenty years, agrees with Ellis. Young notes at least six ancient dance traditions that framed contemporary Oklahoma powwow dancing, including the ‘Grass Dance’ which had originally been practiced by northern Plains Indian groups.⁵

Kavanagh, through his studies of the history of Southern Plains dances and Comanche Powwows, describes the diffusion of the Grass Dance across the Plains by the late 1800’s and sees it, and other society dances, as precursors to the contemporary powwow.⁶

By this time in history, forced removal to reservations had come to many American Indian tribes. As the federal government’s policy on ‘the Indian problem’ changed forever the way Indians lived, the old songs and dances of the traditional warrior societies responded to these new realities. “Change”, Ellis states, “kept these dances meaningful and relevant,” as old and young warriors were kept within the boundaries of the reservations.⁷

Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States government perpetuated a campaign to suppress many cultural traditions of Indians, most specifically dances and dance gatherings on the reservations. The Indian Office labeled those society rituals, or dances, as uncivilized, animalistic and lurid spectacles that kept Indians from tending to their crops and homes. History shows that the Government was never able to suppress
dance performance or the spirit that accompanied it. In 1924, the government finally relented. Secretary of Interior, Huber Work, stated he had no intention of stopping any dance that had religious significance or was performed for pleasure. Ironically, during the same time the government was trying to suppress dancing, another institution that was directly dependent on Indians and their dances, was gaining popularity with the masses.8

The Wild West shows, medicine shows and carnivals, popular entertainment at the turn of the century, provided just the venue needed to refresh native spirits and encourage many Indian people to continue their dance and song traditions. By the turn of the century, there were 50 different shows including the most famous, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. As L.G. Moses noted, Indians who participated in the Wild West shows were not dragged into it: they signed on for travel, adventure and pay and for the opportunity to dance unfettered by government interference.9

Within the arena of the traveling shows, the basic structure of today’s powwow can be seen. Drums, dancing, reenacting battles, recognition of warriors, the pageantry of native “costumes”, cultural performance and the circular movement of the show around the arena can all be seen in the contemporary powwows. Even the grand entry of the Wild West parade was soon adopted into contemporary powwows as the formal opening of the festivity.10

According to Ellis, there is also evidence to show that competition dancing in powwows stems from the business practice of holding auditions and paying for dancers for the Wild West shows. What was good entertainment for the public became something more to the Indians who participated. Paying Indians to be Indians, Ellis
writes, “was an unwitting but efficient encouragement in the maintenance of traditional institutions.”

The twentieth century opened a new chapter in American Indian history as modern warfare became the catalyst for monumental changes in American Indian life. Over a sixty year span, America was embroiled in four major wars. During World War I, Indian people joined the ranks of the enlisted and many traditional Indian cultures gained a sense of renewed importance. Indian communities sponsored dances to honor returning service men and warrior societies danced in celebration of honor and valor.

Thomas A. Britten notes that in World War I, the Pawnee, Comanche, Omaha, Arapaho, Cheyenne and Sioux tribes held traditional dances, such as ‘Scalp Dances’ (Victory Dances), and ‘Give Away Dances’ to honor their men and women warriors before and after the War. “Native American participation in World War I strengthened traditional Indian cultures” says Britten “and demonstrated that their traditional ceremonialism was still in tact.”

Alison R. Bernstein looks at changes brought about by World War II to American Indians on and off reservations. Celebrating the return of the warriors had once again become an important event. She agrees with Bitten and Ellis, that “like their [non-Indian] counterparts, most veterans received a hero’s welcome back in Indian Country.”

Loretta Fowler mentions that during World War II, Cheyenne and Arapaho women ‘War Mothers’ spearheaded the organized dances held to honor those tribes’ servicemen. War Mothers are women who have lost their sons in battle during war. War Mother groups are still active within the powwow culture.
Ellis noted that during the Korean War, Oklahoma Comanche people held homecoming dances for returning Korean veterans in 1952, which led to a powwow tradition called “Comanche Homecoming” – now an annual event inviting any American Indian veteran to participate.\(^15\)

In his work on American Indians in Vietnam, Tom Holm states that in 1981, the first National Vietnam Veterans’ Powwow in Shawnee, Oklahoma came about specifically to honor the returning Viet Nam veterans, “to give the area’s Indian veterans a feeling of being remembered for their sacrifices in the war.”\(^16\)

It is clear that the World Wars and the Korean and Vietnam Wars were instrumental in the revitalization of warrior society celebrations and memorials and perpetuated the time honored tradition of gathering and celebrating with song and dance. Ellis states that this revived dance culture of honoring warriors swept across to the Plains and coalesced into the modern intertribal powwow. Powwows became post-war celebrations - an integration of the older practices of military societies and more contemporary forms of dance that are both tribal and intertribal.\(^17\)

The post-war proliferation of powwows continued across the Nation and rapidly increased during the last half of the twentieth century and into the new millennia. The powwow we see today is a result of a one hundred year evolution shaped by these events in American history.\(^18\)
Powwow and American Indian Identity

Defining the contemporary powwow is as complex and multi-faceted as the native people who believe it is part of their tribal and Indian identity. In the broadest definition, the powwow is described as an American Indian intertribal social gathering that celebrates native culture, traditions, customs, and beliefs, expressed in the performance of songs, drums and dance. They are resplendent with music and movement, color and excitement all wrapped up in a flurry of non-stop activities.

Powwows vary in size, location and purpose. Some gatherings are very large events sponsored by business associations or casinos. These powwows have numerous food and craft vendors with dancers and drum groups competing for prize money, all of which attracts many spectators. Powwows can also be small, community oriented gatherings where participants and spectators know each other and no vending or prize money is offered. In this case, they are usually sponsored by several families for a very specific purpose, such as a memorial for a family elder. Today, powwow events are widespread across the country.

As discussed in the previous section on powwow history, the end of World War II marked the proliferation of contemporary powwows throughout the United States. In the early 1950’s the powwow, as an historical and cultural phenomenon, came under serious academic scrutiny and it continues to attract a growing repertoire of sound interdisciplinary studies. The multi-faceted complex nature of the powwow provides historians and other scholars a plethora of topics for debate. Not all scholars agree as to the meaning of the powwow and the arguments can be complicated as ‘meaning’
becomes intertwined with identity. Some of the perspectives on ‘powwow meaning’ are discussed below and may help to illuminate how the Cherokee people navigate their own identity as “Cherokee”.

James Howard and William W. Newcomb, Jr., produced some of the first scholarly articles written on the powwow. Howard discusses the powwow within the larger context of assimilation. He argues that the powwow precluded tribal distinction and described the powwow as the “principal secular focus” of a homogenous Indian society that decried tribal distinction. In contrast, Newcomb argues that the Cherokee-Delaware in Oklahoma were not completely assimilated into the dominant, non-Indian society because of the powwow and lent more credence to the powwow’s role in keeping total assimilation at bay.19

Young and Ellis give full accounts of powwow culture through the perspective of the Southern Plains tribes but use different approaches in their studies. Young’s ethnohistorical work on Oklahoma powwows provides a basis for understanding powwow function and meaning and its role in the development of Southwest Indian identity. Young also suggests that the powwow can be an educational medium for teaching Indian ways to Indians who have lost their cultural contact with their own people. She states that “the powwow may be seen as one step in processes which are moving Indian people and Indian culture in the United States from the isolation of tribalism to full societal participation. The retention of a unique identity action serves as a safeguard against the possibility of total assimilation and the resulting loss of Indian culture.” She argues that the powwow is built on the philosophy of ‘Indianness’ and as
such, serves to blend members of disparate groups into a singular identity based on previously established stereotypes with the added benefit of improved mental health of the participants by social interactions at the powwow.  

Ellis’ history of the Southern Plains powwow culture identifies the historical roots of the modern powwow and reveals how the powwow and its role in contemporary Indian identity have changed over time. He writes that the role of the powwow “in maintaining old ways and introducing new ones is compelling and clear” and argues that during the last fifty years, the powwow has become one of the most popular and visible expressions of cultural identity in Indian life today. 

Both Young and Ellis have sound and informative studies and their arguments are valid about Indians of the Southwest and southern Plains areas. Young’s argument may hold true for urban Indians not part of a reservation community, who are geographically far from other Indians, or for those who do not practice any traditions of their people. However, solidifying a group identity based on previously established stereotypes is something that would more easily happen with non-Indians wanting to be Indians, than with Indians who already have a distinct tribal identity, such as the Eastern Cherokee.

As with Young, Ellis’ argument is similar in its presentation of an over-arching philosophy of ‘Indianness’, which serves to establish a concrete connection of powwow influence in all American Indian groups. However, this philosophy neglects distinct tribal histories. As an example, many eastern and northwestern tribal histories do not include the powwow as a critical component to their aboriginal identity - log homes and totem poles present a different ‘Indian’ than the teepee and war bonnet. That is not to say
that they do not have parallel traditions that are seen within the powwow structure. According to Cherokee people on the Reservation, the Stomp Dance is culturally definitive. They are quick to point out that Stomp dancing is rooted in Cherokee history and powwow dancing is rooted in the Southwest and Plains Indian dances. As discussed more fully in the next chapter, being Indian does not automatically subscribe one to the powwow genre as an Indian identity marker.\textsuperscript{22}

Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., Philip J. Deloria and Joseph Tilden Rhea, tackle the issue of Indian identity and imagery through three different perspectives. Berkhofer presents the development of the white man’s Indian and the implications of this idea used by white society to understand Indians. Deloria reveals how the role of ‘playing Indian’ has helped formulate a national identity and how White America sees themselves based on a connection to ‘the Indian’ image. Rhea examines how the Indians have used political power, and race to counter ‘the Indian’ images presented in Berkhofer and Deloria’s arguments, and promote their own constructed Indian identity.

In his book, “The White Man’s Indian”, Berkhofer argues that since Native Americans did not see themselves in the singular or as a collective group, the ideology attached to the collective term ‘the American Indian’, is a fabrication of white imagination. He states that the white image of the uncivilized Indian was used and underwritten by the federal government as a means of controlling the Indian problem and to keep white men empowered over native people. White descriptions of Indians changed over time according to the justification of federal policy, such as forced removals to the West, or to strengthen the prevailing social movement of the day, such as
the disenfranchised status of World War II Indian veterans. The most powerful visual representation of white Indian imagery came with the Hollywood western movies, where the Indian imagery ran the gamut from whooping bloodthirsty heathen to the noble savage, fighting bravely against a force he can not overcome - the white man. He states that what began as an image alien to Native Americans became a reality to them, forcing them to be the Indians that whites said they were regardless of their own original cultural identity.23

It should be pointed out here that Berkhofer wrote during the late 70’s when Indian people were viewed with distinct negative prejudices. To some degree, they are still viewed with the same misconceptions, as indicated by the often repeated phrase, ‘all Indians are drunks’. But the economic situation for some Indian tribes has improved over the last thirty years. Tribal financial enterprises, like reservation casino, and the jobs and money that go with it, have increased the financial stability of those Indian people. Casino profits have made the Florida Seminoles some of the wealthiest people in the state. Using their new found wealth, they present their history, hence their own constructed identity, as they see fit. Also, Berkhofer’s study does not include the native voice, so consequently, what Indians think about the image promoted by the white man’s Indian was not addressed. His writing indicates that he sees Indians as helpless victims to this race/image/identity issue. However, it can be argued that history shows otherwise. For example, the Eastern Cherokee have consciously used the ‘white man’s Indian’ for their own gain through out history: from willing trade with early European people, to special incentives for college, and cultivating tourism based on white expectations. They
construct an identity that uses the concept of ‘us’ and ‘others’. They jealously guard their collective idea of "being Cherokee" against all intruders, even against other Indians, as they did in the Lumbee issue regarding federal recognition. Numerous council meetings held in 2005 revealed the stand of the Eastern Cherokee when this issue was brought up.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians as a sovereign nation, quite firmly and sometimes with open hostilities, refused to help the Lumbee secure federal recognition, saying they were “not Cherokee.” However, federal recognition, which is based on Berkhofer's definition of the white man’s Indian, means federal money and programs to the tribe – benefits that would have to be shared with ‘others’.24

Deloira, like Berkhofer, looks at the white man’s idea of Indianness and establishes a connection between ‘the Indian’ and American identity. By defining what it means to be an Indian, white Americans can define what they are not. And in the disillusionment of this ideology, Deloria says, white Americans revert to ‘playing Indian’ From the Boston Tea Party to the powwow circuit today, Deloria reveals how non-Indian people have played Indian, appropriating Indian practices and images in order to establish what it means to be American. Yet, Deloria says, “an increasing number of Indians participated in white people’s Indian play . . . legitimating the performative tradition of aboriginal American identity.” Here Deloria’s argument differs from Berkhofer on several issues. Deloria adds the native voice to his discussion and he does not see native people as helpless victims. He states that native people not only exerted influence over the Indian images, Indians found themselves “acting Indian, mimicking white mimickings of Indianness.” Deloria believes that although playing Indian is not the
reality of native people, it has “allowed for an intercultural meeting ground upon which Indians and non-Indians created new identities for white Americans and Indians themselves.” He discusses the powwow circuits as one example of this cultural crossover - where Indian and non-Indian dance side by side in Indian and non-Indian events. As discussed in the following chapter, the Eastern Cherokee avail themselves of the powwow and Deloria’s ‘playing Indian’ can be seen in this venue, embraced by non-Indians and Indians alike.25

Rhea’s takes his premise in a slightly different direction than those proposed by Berkhofer and Deloria. Berkhofer and Deloria look at how whites see Indians. Rhea examines how Indians identify themselves and ‘others’ within the constructs of race and identity. Through examples of Indian political activism - the Indian takeover of Alcatraz in 1969 to the renaming of an historic battlefield site in 1991 -Rhea describes how Indian people have tried, and succeeded, “to revise the popular memory of the Indian in American history. . . Indians fought to replace Patriotic orthodoxy with their own version of history.” Rhea argues that within the “Red Power” movement, Indians define themselves in racial terms and promote the identity of the “red man”. He reiterates the argument of Deloria that Indians are not silent victims but active proponents who have used racial ideology for their benefit. Rhea explains that changes at historic sites and the NAGPRA legislation indicate the success of this constructed racial identity. He concludes that Indians “have gained such control over their past that they have effected a virtually complete reversal of American attitudes toward Indians.”26

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Contrary to Rhea’s argument, the Eastern Cherokee struggle today to promote “being Cherokee” outside of the collective identity of the “red man”. Many recent historical events chronicle American Indian success in the struggle to overcome negative images of Indianness, as seen within national parks, where the picture of American history is being reinterpreted with Indian perspectives. But with limited success, it is perhaps too soon to conclude that there has been a “complete reversal” of American attitudes toward Indians. Deloria says, something more than politics was involved when Red Power activists of the ‘60’s and 70’s put action to their protests against the inequality of Indians in America. They were committing “cultural acts” in which they sought power, propelled by their “deeply rooted desire to be Indian and thereby aboriginally true to the spirit of the land.” As previously discussed, the image of an Indian, whether constructed or imposed by whites or Indians, remains complicated at best, and can not be reconciled by political victories alone. 27

All humans construct their identity based on what they believe is their own history. Indians are no different. How Indians perceive themselves and therefore ‘others’ is a based on a constructed identity. The following discussion focuses on Indian historical representation as seen from American Indian perspectives.

David Whitehorse, Lita Matthews, George P. Horse Capture are American Indian scholars who discuss the history and ethnography of the powwow with a native participant’s voice. Working as mediators between two worlds – Indian and non-Indian, they translate the historical processes that are symbolic within the intertribal interactions
of powwows. Although Whitehorse, Matthews, and Horse Capture all use the ‘native voice’, they differ in their theoretical approaches and in their findings.

In his work on the powwow as a contemporary ‘pan-Indian’ celebration, Whitehorse argues that the powwow is experiential and can only be really understood and analyzed by one who is a participant and an observer. The astute participant/observer can be American Indian or non-Indian, as it is the act of participating that reveals the dynamic meaning of the powwow. He states that the powwow elements of greatest significance are the least overt and are hidden by numerous levels of rituals and images - therefore the powwow experience is dynamic and fully integrated into the lives of its participants.28

Contrary to Whitehorse, Lita Mathews states that vital to understanding powwows, is “the perception of myself and others who share similar lifestyles.” Her findings suggest that Indians and ‘others’ are seeking a way to get closer to native American traditions and culture through attending powwows, again much like Deloria’s argument on ‘playing Indian’. Interestingly, Mathews uses the term ‘others’, to denote anyone who is not like herself – ‘others’ as determined by her own view of race and image of Indian people. Mathews explains that although there are negative as well as positive forces that drive contemporary powwows, most powwow participants do perceive the powwows as significant cultural and social events in their lives. It is important to note that Mathews’ study does not involve powwows in the Southeast and her conclusions are generally affixed to the Plains and Southwest powwow culture. Most Eastern Cherokee people do not consider the powwow to be a culturally important event.
However, Cherokee people who frequently attend powwows say they feel a connection to the event in that it celebrates Indianess.  

Horse Capture provides a shorter, but equally insightful, description of the powwow genre through his own personal experiences as a powwow participant on the powwow trail in the West. Horse Capture follows the same literary style that Whitehorse and Matthews use to articulate Indian identity as seen by Indians but he also addresses the image of the white man’s Indian as seen by white men. “People inquire if you can do a rain dance because it is dry, or ask where is your squaw (meaning your wife) or do have papooses (meaning babies). This happens all the time. Meeting racism on every front changes you, perhaps distorts you. It is destructive to all parties and never ceases.” Obviously, Horse Capture would not agree with Rhea’s statement that America shows “a complete reversal of American attitudes toward Indians.” Words like squaw, rain dance and papoose, are part of the image of the white man’s Indian. With comments and slurs like these, Horse Capture says “the cycle of racism is still alive and thriving in Indian Country.”

In Loretta Fowler’s comprehensive study of Gros Ventre Indian history, the paradox of shared symbolism and contested meanings is fully explored in her discussion on interpreting cultural revival. Fowler particularly looks the institution of powwows as a place where Indians define themselves based on their interpretation of the symbols. Fowler states that the Gros Ventre youth and elders are separated by their interpretation of powwow symbolism. The youth view the powwow as an intertribal social relationship with outsiders - to the elders, dances are to be intimate affairs that reaffirm Gros Ventre
social organization. Fowler says that the young Gros Ventre have gained their concept of identity, not so much from their elders, as through their contacts with other young Indians from outside areas and from mass media presentations of the Plains Indians and powwows. The Gros Ventre have adopted much of the powwow symbolism in the construct of their identity. Again, Deloria’s idea of Indians playing Indians seems to underwrite the construction of identity for the Gros Ventre youth. Although Whitehorse, Matthews and Horse Capture do not address the issue of youth and lost meanings, Matthews does state that even the most ardent young powwow participants bring their own meaning into the powwow performance, different than that of their elders. Addressing the issue of Indian historical representations, Fowler notes that even as Indians struggle to remain culturally distinct, their alliance with ‘others’, be it Indian or non-Indian, has colored their interpretations of their own histories.31

Interpretations of the historical construct and symbolism of the powwows is addressed by Patricia Albers and Bea Medicine. At a seminar given at the Larom Institute at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in June, 2004, Albers and Medicine discussed how powwows vary in all aspects of history, function and components. In contrast to various interpretations which focus exclusively on the economic, social and/or ideological dimensions of powwows, they offer a perspective that involves a “multi-dimensional interpretation”, arguing that powwows are very different in where they are held, who supports them, who attends, what they involve and what kinds of identities and meanings they promote. Albers says that even though the powwows began in the Plains regions, the powwows have as many meanings as there are Plains participants – each
brings his or her own ideas of Indian identity to the gatherings. Medicine discussed the diffusion of the powwow across the country. “The ‘phenomena of the powwow phenomena’ is that it has spread beyond the Great Plains in recent times to urban areas and to regions where it does not have long-standing cultural roots.” In contrast to Albers, Ellis argues that history reveals the Southwest as the birthplace of the contemporary powwow – it later diffused to the Plains region. He does agree, however, that the powwow rapidly spread to regions that are geographically distant from the Plains region. The Eastern Cherokee people provide an example of this diffusion. Although the powwow does not have a long history among the Cherokees and the Great Smokey Mountains is an area far from the Plains region, the Cherokee people include the powwow event as part of the Indian identity they present to the public.32

Regardless of the various types of powwows mentioned above by Albers and Medicine, the powwow itself provides a stage for native identity to be enacted in performance of traditions. Yet, just as surely as powwows provide a cultural common ground of native identity, they also provide an arena for contestation of values, beliefs and status. Mark Mattern explains that the powwow is a “communicative arena,” better understood when seen through the dual, paradoxal roles of unity and diversity. The powwow plays an important part in these social negotiations. Mattern argues that this role of enabling the negotiation of differences and disagreements helps manage the tension between unity and diversity, making Indian communities more resilient and adaptable. Ellis agrees and notes that the powwows cause as much debate and arguing about what constitutes legitimate ‘Indian’ expressions as does gaming and peyote. He
says the powwow “does as much to divide Indian people as it does to unite them” and this debate can be seen throughout the history of the powwow.33

Like many issues that involve Indian people today, powwows are complex and multi-layered and cause more debates than agreements about what they are and what they mean. The powwow does not provide a cultural connection to all Cherokees and obviously does not epitomize everyone’s idea of what it means to be Indian. However, the studies discussed above provide valuable insight into powwow culture and its historical connections to the construction of Indian identity. Although the powwow is not accepted by Eastern Cherokee people as the sum of their identity, the powwow does play a part in the ‘Indian’ face they present within the tourist industry, and to some degree, to their Cherokee selves. Reconciling history, image and identity is a difficult task that still lies ahead for the Eastern Cherokee.
Attracting tourists to the Cherokee Indian Reservation, in Cherokee, North Carolina, has been an economic necessity since the early 1900’s. The introduction of the Indian Fair in 1914, similar in form and function to the popular county fairs, marked the beginning of a deliberate pursuit to develop a tourist economy. Except for a few years during World War I and World War II, the Fair has been an annual event for the last ninety-five years. Soon photographic advertisements featuring Cherokee Indians appeared in great quantity. Designed to encourage visitors, commercial photography became an important part of the tourist industry. Cherokee people willingly posed for pictures in stereotypical clothing and propped backdrops in an effort to meet the expectations of tourists. The opening of The Great Smokey Mountains National Park provided a whole new realm in tourism for the reservation as thousands of tourists made their way toward the mountains each year. The introduction of an outdoor drama in 1950, was a collective effort by Cherokee tribal council members and the Cherokee Historical Association, designed to present a piece of Cherokee history to visitors in a theatrical format. A few years later, plans were made to open a living Cherokee village and a small Cherokee museum, all constructed with the hope of drawing more visitors to the Reservation and these attractions met with relative success. By the 1980’s, with the advent of modern tourist attractions in Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, the Tribe found itself hard pressed to keep these financial and cultural ventures afloat. Even the
Cherokee Tribal Bingo, a sure bet in tourist dollars, was experiencing a drop in revenue. A stagnated economy fueled by a decline in Reservation tourism necessitated action and the Tribal council was open to all suggestions that might provide a lift to the sagging tourist trade. Here it is important to understand how and why the Eastern Cherokee offer the powwow as public event for tourist.¹

**Selective Purpose**

The concurrent creation of the Great Smokey Mountains National Park (formally inaugurated in 1934) and the appointment of John Collier as Indian Commissioner cemented the future of a tourist-oriented job market for reservation Cherokees. Collier’s commitment to the preservation of Cherokee culture and their traditional crafts helped prepare the Cherokee for the onslaught of visitors and supporting markets that were to come. Roads through the Park and the Reservation offered promising economic opportunities for the Eastern Cherokee - year long jobs along augmented by the seasonal tourist trade.²

It was understood by the National Park Service, the Indian agents assigned to the Reservation and by many Cherokee people themselves that National Park visitors would expect to see and be photographed with “real” Indians – the type seen in the early Hollywood western movies. And, at this point in the fledgling tourist trade, pageantry was more important than historical accuracy. Cherokee agents promoted participation in any event that would help the Cherokee people be noticed, with the goal of luring tourists to the Reservation. Parades, festivals, and all other such public events off or on the
Reservation, were encouraged. If *real* Indians are what the tourist dollar would support, than *real* is what the tourist got. The image of the Cherokee Indian is presented, then, according to the expectation of white visitors. The Hollywood version, or Berkhofer’s ‘white man’s Indian’ is central to the historical representation of Cherokee people during most of the 20th century. And as discussed in the last chapter, the Cherokee people are not helpless victims to this rhetoric of imagery. In fact, the Cherokee willingly and enthusiastically oblige as this insures an income and means money in the pocket. Self-promotion as ‘an Indian’, any Indian, can still provide the boundary between ‘us’ and ‘others’. This racialized identity was purposefully used by the Cherokee from the earliest beginnings of their tourist industry. This can be seen in the old photographs and publications produced by the Park Service and the Cherokees Tribe.

As early as 1925, purposely posed and staged pictures became advertisements for the benefit of curious tourists. An early photograph (circa. 1925) of Carl Standing Deer, shows the Cherokee man in an opened fringed shirt and a full feathered Sioux war bonnet posing in front of a painted Plains Indian tipi. This propped photograph was taken near his home on the Cherokee reservation. [See Figure 1.] Another photograph (circa 1925) shows a blanket-draped Cherokee woman, her Flapper-era hair style held in place by an Indian headband, sitting on the steps of a porch with pottery placed around her, holding a hand-loom used for beading. [See Figure 2.]

Another more involved example of ‘the Indian’ image usage is recounted in a story told by John R. Finger in his book, *Cherokee Americans*. In 1935, the downtown area of Ashville, North Carolina, played host to a parade that featured people, floats, civic
displays and many Cherokee Indians. Goinback Chiltoskey, a recognized elder in the Cherokee community, led the parade riding a white horse and wearing Sioux regalia which included a rather large feathered headdress commonly called a ‘war bonnet’. The Cherokee float featured a basket weaver, pottery maker and several Cherokee ‘princesses’. So enthralled was the crowd by this spectacle, that the Cherokee float was awarded first prize by the judges. According to Finger, such festivals and parades throughout the 1930’s were common events for the Cherokee, who willingly agreed to such events and promoted themselves accordingly. 3

Another example of plying the tourist trade comes in the form of a very interesting tourist publication, produced in 1937 by J.L. Caton Publisher, in Knoxville, Tennessee. It is entitled “Eastern Cherokees: How They Live Today – Their History.” Decorating the cover of the booklet is a sketch of a Cherokee Indian man and woman clothed in typical Southwest or Plains Indian fringed attire. The feathered war bonnet on the head of the man helps to complete the picture that presents both Indian figures stoically aiming their bows and arrows toward the sky. [See Figure 3.] Thumbing through this booklet, the avid tourist can see many photographs of Eastern Cherokee people in action at work and play, and see the type of homes they may live in. In the pictorial lineup of residential dwellings of the past, the reader looks at a photograph of a woman in a contemporary dress standing in the doorway of the teepee – the caption states that “the ancient teepee was used in earliest days.” [See Figure 4.] Though not historically correct as Cherokee people did not wear war bonnets or lived in teepees, it appealed to the public expectations as advertisements were designed to do. 4
Tourism once again lagged on the Reservation during World War II, but it soon gathered momentum after the War’s end. There was resurgence in outside interest in American Indians as the public became aware of Indians’ invaluable participation and service in the War effort. The public exploitation of Ira Hayes, the Pima Indian who helped raise the American Flag on the island of Iwo Jima, played a major role in renewed American Indian recognition and interest. Increasing public interest in American Indians coupled with the lift of gasoline restrictions and post-war prosperity, signaled possible economic relief to the lagging Cherokee tourist trade.

Once again, in an attempt to jump start Cherokee Reservation tourism, an explosion of photographic advertisements picturing real Indians were produced in the 1940’s to publicize the Great Smokey Mountains area and the Cherokee Indian Reservation. According to George Frizell, Curator for Special Collections Department at Western Carolina University, this became the mainstay of tourist advertisements that helped revive tourism on the Reservation after the War. “These pictures and postcards, all designed for tourist publications, were not historically correct. That was not important then - getting people to come to the Reservation was. In the 1970’s, a lot of postcard type advertisements were produced. The Cherokee Museum even used to sell these types of postcard souvenirs. I don’t think they do anymore but I believe you can still find them today in the tourist shops downtown.”

The biggest boom to post-war tourism for the Reservation came in the form of a drama entitled, “Unto These Hills”, the now famous play about the forced removal of the Cherokee people. This drama opened to an enthusiastic crowd of 2400 people for its
first performance in July 1, 1950. Ironically, few Cherokee people were given parts in the drama except as “extras” for the crowd scenes. It was non-Indian people who played the major Cherokee character roles. It was not until 1989 that a local Cherokee, Jimmy Bradley, was given the part of the Eagle Dancer, a major role, for the first time in the history of the play.6

The costumes in the drama were more an eclectic combination of various tribes’ traditional dress than traditional Cherokee dress. [See Figure 8.] As with most productions created for this purpose, historical accuracy takes a back seat to generalizations and stereotypes. Nevertheless, the infusion of cash brought by reservation visitors attending the drama was readily accepted by the Cherokee community.7

Even with the success of the Outdoor Drama, the Oconaluftee Indian Village and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, competition for tourist dollars remains an urgent contest. With the buildup of rival tourist towns, like the Tennessee towns of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge lying just across the western border, the drain on tourist capitalism is a real possibility. One year, tourists were drawn completely away from the Cherokee area due to Tennessee hosting the World’s Fair. In 1982, Evanelle Thompson, acting Cherokee agent, reported to the Eastern Area Director, that “The Cherokee community is experiencing one of the poorest tourist seasons in recent years. Everyone had anticipated an excellent year due to the fact that the World’s Fair is in Knoxville. However, the Fair has apparently been detrimental rather than helpful and many people who found jobs earlier in the season have been laid off.” 8
The Tribal Council entertained various suggestions that would help underpin the lagging tourist economy. An annual ‘powwow’ was suggested, talked about and eventually accepted by the Tribal Council as an event that could be held on the Ceremonial Grounds sometime in the summer. Although some voiced their disagreement, a public powwow was about to make an appearance on the Reservation.

In June, 1985, an announcement was made by the planning committee of Cherokee Cultural and Ceremonial Grounds, Inc., of the upcoming community event called the ‘Heritage Day and Powwow’. Advertised as a three-day event in the local reservation newspaper, *Cherokee One Feather*, the article highlighted Indian dancing along with various other activities available during the powwow. Calling for a community-wide cooperative effort, all vendors, crafters, dancers, game contestants, and any other interested parties were invited to join in the festivities as planning for the first annual heritage Day and Powwow was underway. Anyone interested in selling Cherokee or mountain crafts and food was solicited. Vendors who would sell Indian foods were given preference in the very limited reservations for food booths. To placate the disgruntled, the activities on July 4\(^{th}\) were specifically planned to emphasize Cherokee cultural activities, including traditional Cherokee dancing and craft demonstrations. Stickball, archery, and blowgun contestants were encouraged to join by contacting a special event coordinator designated to handle these traditional sporting events.\(^9\)

Yet, always mindful of the tourist, the article elicits the general market of would-be spectators by announcing other entertainment opportunities such as country music, horseshoe tournaments and a Gospel Sing, followed by a fireworks display. In an effort
to solicit full community support and involvement with the development of the event, the article read “Anyone wishing to help the Planning Committee is invited to attend the next meeting which will be June 6th at 7:00 P.M. at the Yellowhill Community Building.” Local businesses were asked to participate by purchasing advertisement space in the souvenir program.10

With high attendance from public spectators, local Cherokee dancers, off-reservation dancers, and craft vendors, the July 4th Powwow was considered an economic success. During the first few years of powwows on the reservation, local Cherokee people enjoyed dancing and many sold traditional Cherokee crafts at the events. The tourist numbers were up and there was a general agreement that this was a good annual event for the tourists.”11

Now that the path had been cleared by the success of the July 4th event, which spoke for itself by showing good annual economic returns, a second powwow was planned. On May 27, 1989, the first Annual Cherokee Indian Memorial Day Powwow was held on the Ceremonial Grounds on the Reservation. This powwow was more readily accepted by local Cherokee as a public display of Cherokee culture than the July 4th powwow had been when it was first suggested.12

The purpose for the second powwow is put on to honor Cherokee elders and veterans. At the same time, Cherokee people make money from tourists. It is not only an economic opportunity but also an opportunity to act on the tradition of respecting the elders in the community and the veneration of warriors. The Memorial powwow is
considered a success and accepted as an annual event within the reservation community.”

Changing Perception

There is no doubt that appealing to the general public’s conception of what an Indian should look and act like is a deliberate and purposeful strategy that has helped serve the economic needs of the Cherokees. Since the birth of reservation tourism in the 1920’s, Cherokee people had been propping photographs with teepees, fringed buckskin and feathered war bonnets. With powwow imagery already part and parcel of the existing tourist expectations, as well as the fact that the Cherokee had previously adapted their public persona to fit those exceptions, producing powwows on the Reservation was a natural stretch. In addition, the Reservation community had a few experienced powwow dancers who had traveled the powwow circuit, could perform dances and sing songs, and they were willing to help. Their collective experiences had shown that the powwow could be a crowd gatherer, inviting all who came to a banquet of pageantry, swirling color, and excitement. Once again, the Cherokee had found and purposefully selected an agreeable and mutually beneficial way to attract visitors and assuage the expectations of the tourist.

Even the local media was agreeable to printing powwow advertisements. The two community newspapers for the Cherokee Reservation and surrounding areas published a list of upcoming powwow events held all across the United States. The Cherokee Times newspaper titles the section “The Powwow Planner: For the avid Powwow-er” and lists

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many scheduled powwows. The Cherokee One Feather dedicates part of its “Happenings” section to a similar list titled “On The Powwow Trail”.14

Today, both powwows offered each year on the Cherokee Reservation include a fair showing of local Cherokee people who are experts at the Southwest and Plains Indian dances and enjoy participating with their fellow dancers from various tribes across the country. Cherokee people can, and do, rent booth space at the powwows to sell their crafts or food.15

Yet it is apparent that in the last few years, Cherokee people have been reassessing the cause and effect relationship of the powwow events on the reservation. Concerns are voiced about the impressions left with visitors once they have gone to the powwows on the reservation. This issue creates some discord among the community members. Even though the powwow might benefit the community economically, the down side is the perpetuation of the stereotypical Hollywood Indian – the image that is very evident in the tourist market of downtown Cherokee. In light of the Tribe’s current collective effort to pursue and present their own Cherokee history, the cost of gaining tourist dollars from the powwows may be too high to pay, according to some Cherokee people.

At the July 4th Powwow, in 2008, a few Cherokee spectators and dancers were publicly sharing their views on the powwow to any listeners. A few feel that the public powwows should be discontinued. One man expressed the opinion that having a powwow on the Reservation is like telling everyone that Cherokee wear all those feathers and yarn, sing real high, and dance in buckskin. Another comments that it does give
people the wrong idea, especially when the announcer says ‘Cherokee dancers come get in line’ as the spectators don’t know who is Cherokee and who are not Cherokee – they just see a bunch of Indians all dressed alike and dancing alike. Other general comments were made explaining that perhaps these powwows were defeating the purpose of trying to be historically Cherokee as the Cherokee songs and dances are not performed during the powwow.  

Yet, there are others who feel the powwow is a good thing but that some changes are in order - changes that might help circumvent the “seen one Indian, you’ve seen them all” mentality. Some suggestions included letting the Cherokee songs and dances be done at the very beginning of the powwow and during the half-time break, advertising these particular dances ahead of time and have the MC educate the public when introducing the Cherokee dances and songs. Vending was another issue discussed in this public forum. Complaints about non-Cherokee crafts being sold at the Cherokee powwows were strongly voiced. Various solutions, such as stricter rules about who can vend and what can be sold, were suggested. At the end of the public discussion, the loud speaker called out for powwow dancers to come to the arena and the crowd dispersed in good humor, staunchly defending their viewpoints.  

Yet, the concerns voiced above loudly bespeak of the tensions that exist within the Reservation community as a whole over the issue of powwow imagery and Cherokee historical representations.

Here it is important to understand that although the Eastern Cherokee do not historically connect with the powwow as a cultural representation of themselves, they do
have deep historical and traditional ties with the main elements of the powwow: song, dance, and warrior veneration. These elements or traditions, which are common to most tribal groups in the country, have been subsumed over the years into the powwow culture as proper powwow content. Outside the powwow genre, these traditions play an important role in helping Cherokees paint their own historical portrait.

The concerns illustrated above speak loudly of the tensions that exist between individual Cherokee and the reservation community as a whole, over the issue of powwow imagery and Cherokee historical representations. This discussion of the appearance of the powwow on the Cherokee Reservation provides the frame work in which the parallel traditions of Cherokee history and powwow imagery can further be addressed.
CHAPTER THREE: CHEROKEE HISTORY AND POWWOW IMAGERY

Throughout the summer months, daily visitors that come to the Cherokee Reservation in Cherokee, North Carolina, number in the thousands. They come to enjoy the beauty of the Great Smokey Mountains and take in the local sights. July is the month that sees the largest number of tourists to Cherokee. Local motel and campground owners are inundated with calls booking reservations for July months in advance, especially for the week of July 4th. Large crowds day and night, packed seating areas, and busy vendor booths are testaments to the fact that tourists want to see the powwow. Yet the powwow is a recent addition to Cherokee tourism. Although this public event figures more heavily in the area of economics than in the presentation of Cherokee historical representation, there are historical connections. This chapter looks at the powwow traditions that run parallel with Cherokee history.¹

Historical Connections

The Cherokees call themselves, the Ani’-Yun'wiya, ‘The Principal People, and have lived in the southern Appalachian Mountains since before the arrival of the Europeans. The original Cherokee territory encompassed lands in present day North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. Constantly reduced through government initiated trickery, broken treaties and treachery of the worst kind by non-Indians and Indians alike, the Cherokee territory was drastically reduced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After the forced
removal of most of the Cherokee people to Indian Territory in 1838, the separated Cherokee people became two tribes. The descendants of the Cherokee who were forced west on the infamous “Trail of Tears”, are today considered Western Cherokee and now comprise the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.²

A small number of other Cherokee people managed to avoid removal by various means, including recognized citizenship or hiding out in the mountains. Some relocated Cherokees managed to return home shortly after the forced march west and rejoined those in the mountains of North Carolina. Their descendants today make up the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians and most live on the Cherokee Reservation in Cherokee, North Carolina.³ [See Figure 9.]

As discussed in Chapter One, powwow history includes dance, song, and the celebration of the warrior tradition within the culture of the Plains and Southwest Indian tribes. The Cherokee, too, have these traditions that are deeply rooted in their history. Ancient Cherokee dances and songs help to illuminate their beliefs and ways of life. Warrior songs and dances are performed to honor the veterans who are held in high esteem by their people. Cherokee dance and song has existed “for as long as we have been here, forever,” an elderly singer says when asked about Cherokee songs.⁴

Early ethnographical literature tells of the prehistorical existence of a strong dance tradition. James Adair recounts his observation (circa 1735) of The Green Corn Dance as the “grand festival” of six main Cherokee festivals. Henry Timberlake (circa 1762) tells of his invitation to a “grand eagle’s tail dance, at which 600 persons of both sexes were assembled”; this account was annotated by Samuel Cole Williams who
expounded on Timberlake’s description saying that this was a dance of “worship of the Great Spirit” and was “the most spectacular and graceful of all their dances,” requiring great endurance from the dancers. James Mooney discusses many songs and dances connected to Cherokee myths and rituals. Frank G. Speck and Leonard Broom, with the collaboration of the very knowledgeable Cherokee man, Will West Long, compiled a comprehensive repertory of dances that include Winter, Summer, and Animal dances, with accompanying rituals of song.

More recently, Walker Calhoun, talked about his childhood years of dancing the animal dances with his uncle, Will West Long, and the importance of keeping those dances and songs in Cherokee life. In his eighties, Calhoun is a respected elder in the Cherokee community, recognized for his knowledge and practice of traditional Cherokee ways. He continues to share and help teach his own people their language, songs, dances, medicines and many other Cherokee life ways from his priceless and irreplaceable repertoire of Cherokee histories. The following excerpt is taken from an interview of Walker Calhoun by Ted Olson in 1992:

I knew that no one was performing these songs [Cherokee] and dances anymore, and I realized that many Cherokees born after 1947 had never known them. So I decided I should teach the songs and dances to all the kids – I have ten children, 25 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. I know I can’t stoop kids from getting interested in rock-and-roll and country music, but I’ve discovered that a lot of the kids come around to learn about the tradition. They realize it is something they should know. Today, when I perform the old dances, I use the little ones because they’re the ones I can teach. We call ourselves the Raven Rock Dancers. The old dances are sacred. The Bear Dance was very important to the ancestors because the bear was a big source of food. . . . I didn’t learn all of the Cherokee dances and songs. . . . I didn’t learn the Groundhog Dance, the Snake Dance, the Moose Dance or the Frog Dance. I don’t know half of what Will West knew.
The warrior tradition is also an integral part of Cherokee history. Warrior men and women, past and present, earn a high status in the community and are venerated through acknowledged recognition of their deeds. Many Cherokee veterans feel that the warrior tradition is as ancient as the mountains surrounding the reservation and it is the warriors that have always kept the Cherokee people together.7

Cherokee Indians have fought side by side with other Americans in every war beginning with the American Revolution. In the Creek War of 1814 it was, ironically, Cherokee Indians who saved General Andrew Jackson in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. In the Civil War, Cherokee men enlisted in active service as well as serving as home guards and border patrol. World War I enlistments were high, as well. In less than one year after World War II started, at least 200 men enlisted in World War II, signing up voluntarily, not waiting to be drafted, with another 250 men working in war related industries far from the Reservation. In an article in a local newspaper in 1942, Cherokees at home were noted for their contributions to the War Bond program and every available plot of ground was used for Cherokee ‘victory gardens’. Records from the Korean War, Viet Nam War, and the Desert Storm Conflict, are equally impressive with Cherokee enlistment and participation in America’s conflicts.8

Theda Perdue’s work on Cherokee women includes discussion on ‘war women’ and Cherokee women warriors. Thomas A. Britten recounts, among others, the exploits of Ammons Tramper and George Allen Owl as they proved themselves great leaders under fire during World War I. Lula Owl, an army medical corps nurse was the only Eastern Cherokee officer in World War I. Alison Bernstein’s study includes a story of
the how the Eastern Cherokees in World War II enlisted as “Indians” after fighting the
draft board’s decision to make them enroll as “Negroes”. Tom Holm’s book on Vietnam
veterans discusses the long post-war journey back home for many Cherokee warriors. He
reveals how they still battle the stigma of an unpopular war and the insidiousness of Post
Traumatic Stress Disorder, or ‘PTSD’.

It is important to note here that the strong warrior tradition as seen within
Cherokee history does not simply represent the willingness and ability to fight battles. It
also represents a social order in which peace time warriors become caretakers of their
people. Cherokee veterans on the reservation today are quick to inform any interested
person that the warrior status does not just apply to times of war and that their duties to
the people are the same today as hundreds of years ago. Following historical traditions,
Cherokee veterans today operate in peace time, assuming some social responsibility and
duties for their people that include helping other Cherokee people get food, or firewood
cut, or gas for their cars. Many times veterans collaborate on their efforts to see to the
social needs of their people and expect nothing in return.

Clearly, the essential powwow elements of dance and song, and the warrior
tradition, are the same cultural elements that are deeply rooted in Cherokee history and
Cherokee life today. And these shared traditions create a middle ground that exists
between the Cherokee and ‘others’ – a middle ground that is illuminated during a
powwow. At any given powwow, one can here articulated emotions that are similarly
expressed across the country. For example, “I like being around other Indians, even
though we do a lot of things differently;” and “He’s an Indian, and she’s an Indian – see,
we’re all Indians…It makes you feel good” are common sentiments felt by many powwow participants. In this sense then, the powwow provides a forum in which to express the collective identity of Indianness.

However, the powwow complex itself, as a medium of cultural expression, is not historically Cherokee. Many Cherokee Reservation residents have no interest in it and feel the Cherokee Reservation powwows are not real powwows. Attributing the powwow to the genre of festivals, some feel the powwow is only for tourists as it has nothing to do with being a Cherokee.

Yet, some Cherokee people frequent powwows as participants and see them as a way to stay connected with friends outside the community or to supplement their income. Many young Cherokee men dance at powwows as a way to earn money for college. Some married couples participate at various powwows as head dancers to supplement the family income and to visit friends.

In 1984, a two-day long powwow gathering of Eastern and Western Cherokees was held at Red Clay council grounds near Cleveland, Tennessee, the site of the last Cherokee council before their forced removal to the west. An Eastern Cherokee vendor was approached by a newspaper reporter covering the historical event and asked to comment on the occasion. “What’s this mean to me? Money. A chance to make money.”

From the time the gates open at the powwow until closing time, spectators are encouraged to explore the vendor section where food and crafts, to buy or trade, are plentiful. This is the scene at the 2004 July 4th Powwow in Cherokee, North Carolina.
where vendors were busily selling their wares to any interested party. After finishing with a customer, one Cherokee vendor commented to people standing around his booth that this powwow was just like a county fair. He did not see many Cherokee vending this year but did see a lot of Guatemalans selling non-Cherokee wares. Regardless, he felt he did well enough to pay his bills and that was all that mattered. ¹⁴

In synthesizing these various perspectives, it appears powwows are accepted as a ‘native’ (not Cherokee) event - enjoyable and useful for a variety of individual reasons. The reasons for attendance vary within both realms of spectatorship and participation. Cherokee people bring to the powwow their own ideas, perceptions and sense of purpose that lands somewhere between ethnic affirmation and pure economics.

This is in stark contrast to the Plains and Southwest Indian people who view powwows as an integral part of their daily life, inextricably linked to their own sense of history and tribal identity. It is apparent that when measured against their sense of Cherokee history and culture, the powwow seems arbitrary and assumes no place of importance in the scheme of daily life on the reservation.

**Influence and Representation**

According to many Cherokee, powwow imagery creates an Indian identity separate from historical, or even contemporary, Cherokee life. Traditionally, powwows did not occur on the reservation. Many adults recall not having powwows on the reservation during their childhood and they could not remember their parents going to any that were offered elsewhere as they were too far away to attend.¹⁵
Time, however, usually brings about change. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Eastern Cherokee tribe sponsors two separate powwow events. The Memorial Powwow in March is held to recognize the elders for their contributions to the Cherokee community. The July 4th Powwow is the larger of the two and it is not by happenstance that this powwow is held at the height of tourist season.\footnote{16}

The purpose of the powwow, then, is based more on tourism than historical identity. Indeed, the stark physical appearance of teepees, feathered war bonnets and Plains style dancing one can see in downtown Cherokee confirms the influence of powwow imagery on Cherokee economics.

The structure of powwows can provide a living embodiment of the Hollywood Indian. At any powwow, one can see Indians who look just like those presented in television and movies. It follows, then, that visitors who come to the Cherokee reservation, come with this same perception of ‘an Indian’ - a real Indian. As tourism is the cash cow on the reservation and its dollars infuse life into the Reservation economy, there is a strong incentive to give the public what they want, or expect, to see.

Yet, tourism also creates a paradox of public perception and what the Cherokees view as their own Cherokee identity. Finger says that tourism increases Cherokee self-awareness even as it dictates the necessary public display of Indianness. “Cherokees must prove to white visitors that they are real Indians by dressing in the stereotypical fashion of the more famous Plains tribes.” This is most evident in a particular form of employment known as Chiefing. The ‘Chief’ wears the stereotypical clothing of Plains Indians and stands among the shops and hotdogs stands as he waits on customer to walk
by. He invites the visitor, for a nominal fee, to take a picture with him, ask questions or just generally converse. Finger states that for those Cherokee who look the part, ‘Chiefing’ can be economically rewarding and there are some Cherokee who have done it for years.\textsuperscript{17}

Barbara Duncan, current Education Director with the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, concurs with Finger’s assessment. She writes:

For many visitors, having their picture taken with a ‘chief’ on the streets of Cherokee, is their first experience with a real native American. Beginning in the early twentieth century, a public influenced by Wild West shows, medicine shows and silent westerns expected to see all Native Americans in Plains Indian dress. Most Eastern Band Cherokees today know that the ‘chiefs’ represent the public’s expectations more than Cherokee tradition, and are non-judgmental about these efforts to connect with visitors.\textsuperscript{18}

The following observation of the tourist area in downtown Cherokee will illustrate this issue:

A stroll in any direction along the tourist strip in downtown Cherokee will eventually bring you to one of several roped off areas in front of a store or parking lot. These areas are reserved for Indian performers who dance to a CD of drums and songs exhibiting several dances to the audience. ‘Chiefing’ responds to tourist demands for the ‘up close and personal’ experience of walking in the midst of real Indians, those epitomized in the Hollywood Westerns. Within one roped area on a sidewalk, a Traditional Dancer, dressed in the familiar Indian war bonnet, leather leggings, and loin cloth, begins to dance. Finishing his deliberate and methodical war dance, he ends with a whooping war cry, much to the delight of his audience. A little further down the street, at a makeshift stage in front of a store, a Fancy Dancer twirls and dips, entertaining the
audience in the same fashion as his co-worker. His feet constantly move, swirling his body around so that wisps of colorful yarn and cloth make beautiful circles of color. As his feet stop on the last drum beat, the inevitable question is voiced from somewhere in the audience - “Are you a real Indian?” Donations are left in the bucket as the awe-inspired tourists walk away, satisfied that they got to see a real Indian. The Cherokee man, hot and tired from his performance, chugs some bottled water. He looks at the people milling around the tourist shops and tries to decide if there are enough tourists around to make it worth doing one more ‘gig’ before calling it a day.\textsuperscript{19}

To many Cherokee, catering to public perception is just the cost of doing business. Portraying the powwow Indian is considered part and parcel of the job. Finger feels that this reasoning is not surprising when livelihoods are made off this perception. “Clearly, the entrepreneurial ethic is firmly enough entrenched among many Cherokees to give customers what they want.” Although visitors also help support more historically accurate attractions like the Oconaluftee Indian Village and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, public interest is visibly less. Contrary to the downtown attractions, crowds and long lines are not a problem at the Village or the Museum.\textsuperscript{20}

The trade off, then, is between the stereotypical image that is projected and the self-constructed Cherokee identity that is internalized. According to the Cherokee, this complicates the issue of presenting historical accuracy. “The image of the Hollywood Indian is so entrenched in the mindset of the visitors to the reservation that they expect to see Cherokee people walking around in buckskin and feathers,” says Duncan. This point is further illustrated by the actions of a few visitors to the Museum of the Cherokee
Indian. A young boy and his father walked around the Museum gift shop, casually surveying the many items for sale: everything from indigenous Cherokee crafts such as hand-woven baskets, wood carvings flint arrowheads and stone sculpture to more modern items such as music CD’s, books on Cherokee history, coffee mugs, tee-shirts and children’s toys. Obviously disinterested, the young boy pulls on his father’s shirt in a silent signal that it was time to leave. The father asked, “What’s the matter? Can’t you find what something you’d like to buy?” The son replies, “No, I don’t see any war bonnets or a scalp knife. This isn’t real Indian stuff, that’s why.” The father responds under the same misconception. “I suppose you’re right, Son, let’s just go,” and the visitors left the Museum gift shop empty-handed.21

There is no doubt that the influence of powwow imagery is visible on the Cherokee reservation – storefronts, attractions and Indians ‘playing Indian’ are testaments to this. However, it appears to be a tool that is consciously used and perpetuated by the Cherokee people for their own benefit. Powwow imagery helps balance the demands of public expectations and making a living on one of the most commercialized reservations in the country.

Unlike the Plains and Southwest tribal people who see the powwow as part of their history that distinguishes them as Indians, the Eastern Cherokee see the powwow as a useful adaptation to the world around them.

At the same time, the Cherokee people are beginning to construct (or reconstruct) their own historical representation. Even as they willingly promote “the white man’s Indian” - infused with powwow imagery of teepees, feathered war bonnets, and buckskin
loincloths - they are pulling away from it in an effort to present themselves within the construct of their own history and their own idea of Cherokee identity. This is not to say that ancient Cherokee traditions have been entirely lost or forgotten. Traditions such as basketry, pottery, animal dances, songs, flint knapping and wood carving are still practiced, especially by older Cherokee people. More recently, younger Cherokee people, encouraged by their elders, are returning to an active participation in these traditions.

A recent advertisement for the 2008 July 4th Powwow in the local newspaper sets the tone. Encompassing the full-page advertisement is a picture of two Cherokee men. One is dressed in Grass Dance regalia that typifies Plains style warrior dancing. It is typical of what one would see at a powwow. The other man presents a strikingly different picture. The man’s face is marked in the ancient warrior tradition with red and black colors – he does not wear a feathered headdress or beadwork. This very effective advertisement reflects the willing use of powwow imagery for a specific purpose. More importantly, it reveals the subtle movement toward constructing their own image, of Cherokee historical representation, which is addressed in the next chapter.²² [See Figure 10.]
CHAPTER FOUR: CHEROKEES ON BEING CHEROKEE

The connection between what the public perceives as Cherokee and how the Cherokee people see themselves is compelling - it reveals their age-old struggle to remain Cherokee in the midst of a dominant, non-Indian society. Paradoxically, existing side by side with the tourist trade based on the white man’s Indian, is a subtle but determined movement to reconstruct their Indian identity into a ‘Cherokee’ identity. Reversing deep seated misconceptions and mitigating stereotyped images is difficult. However, the juxtaposition of Cherokee tourism and Cherokee identity is slowly being reconciled as the tribe works toward an acceptable balance of historical representation and tourist expectations. Their goal is to present their own identity as ‘Cherokee’, not ‘Indian’ and keep tourist dollars, both of which they feel are essential to Cherokee life on the Reservation. Pursuing that goal is a challenge that has been met with determined resolve by the Tribal Council and the community. The following discussion identifies the issues paramount to the Cherokee in their effort to reaffirm their heritage and then examines the means by which they are constructing their own identity separate of tourist expectations, the image of the white man’s Indian, or powwow imagery.¹
Hidden Histories, Revived Traditions

While they may argue and disagree about numerous and important issues within the Council house and outside amongst themselves, the Cherokee people remain staunch and undivided in the belief about what makes them Cherokee. Outside of their political identity, based on blood quantum and a tribal enrollment card issued by the B.I.A., the Cherokee people realize a deeper and more meaningful identity that is based on interpretations of their own history and what is important to them. This realization is the impetus for the growing movement among Cherokee people to rediscover their history and who they are.

According to many Cherokee leaders, this progressive cultural movement is already producing positive results and there is a very visible resurgence of Cherokee pride within the reservation community. Duncan, who directs and is actively involved in many of the programs and projects for the preservation of Cherokee history and culture, also acknowledges a renaissance of cultural interest by the Cherokee people themselves. “I see a tremendous amount of time and effort being put out by the Cherokee community here, right now, today. They have come to realize they are the keepers of their history, their identity and it’s their responsibility for the future, too, for generations to come.”

Even with this extraordinary and forward moving effort by the Cherokee people to reclaim their history, they find themselves in a race against time to save their language, which to the Cherokee, is equivalent to saving themselves. Modern Cherokee identity is wrapped up in ancient dances, songs, stories and traditions – all of which are inextricably
tied to the Cherokee language. Most of the speakers are elderly and when they pass on, the language passes with them.

As is true for all cultural groups, the Cherokee language is more to the Cherokee people than just syntax and syllabary. The emotional bond between Cherokee people and their language touches the very core of who they are, as a nation and as a people. During a language class offered to the public on the Cherokee Reservation, some of the Cherokee class participants openly shared their views with all in attendance. “If we lose our language, we lose ourselves,” says one Cherokee woman. Another Cherokee participant tearfully says, “I have not ever taken time to learn my own language. My mom speaks it, she tried to teach me – I just wasn’t interested then.” Now I am very sorry for that . . . I hope it’s not too late for me.” Another explains, “I couldn’t teach my kids ‘because I didn’t know it very good. Now that I am getting better at speaking, I’m going to work with my kids. I can’t think how I would feel if I couldn’t teach my kids.”

One of my relatives was punished for speaking Cherokee in class in grade school. He had to go to the restroom and couldn’t say it in English. So the teacher made him stay in my seat . . . well, then he had an accident. When the teacher saw that, she put him in the corner the rest of the day. It was hard for him. That’s why sometimes he won’t like to speak the language with anyone except other speakers, other Cherokee. It hurts his heart to remember.

In response to the very real possibility of losing the Cherokee language altogether, the Tribe has initiated several major language projects. Through the Museum and the Cherokee Indians Kituwah Preservation and Education Program, language projects are in place. Programs such as the Documenting Endangered Language project,
Cherokee Language Writer’s Workshops, and Speaker’s Gatherings, are designed to help circumvent the loss of the Cherokee language. A language emersion program has been instituted reservation wide in all the schools, including the child care facilities. Classes are offered free to the Cherokee people and at a nominal charge to the interested non-Cherokee public. Fluent speakers are helping to teach and to transcribe numerous documents written in the Cherokee syllabary.5

In 2005, the Museum received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Science Foundation to help digitize 8000 pages of Cherokee language materials, primarily the James Mooney collection of documents. More recently, author Charles Frazier donated the Cherokee language translation rights to his latest book, Thirteen Moons. This donation marks the beginning of the new Cherokee Literature Initiative, whose mission is to eventually provide reading material written in the Cherokee language for all Cherokee language students.6 [See Figure 11.]

When the Bureau of Indian Affairs took control over the Cherokee Reservation schools after World War II, non-Indian teachers were brought in to help standardize education on the reservation. In the process, out went the Cherokee language, history and culture. Today, the tribe runs their schools. Still competitive in the curriculum mandated by the State of North Carolina, innovative educational programs reintroduce Cherokee history within their reservation classrooms.

In 2007, the tribe instituted a program in the Cherokee High School that requires seniors to have one semester of Cherokee language and one semester of Cherokee history before they are allowed to graduate. Elementary school children are taught the Cherokee
syllabary and grammar along side English lessons. Stories and songs are sung in the Cherokee language to the little ones at the day care facility.⁷

Senior students at the Cherokee High School look forward to the Cherokee history and culture classes. Final school projects involve doing a traditional craft, such as hand carving a Cherokee war club or weaving a basket. Students also have part time jobs at the Oconaluftee Indian Village or the Outdoor Drama that encourages authentic participation in their heritage and history.⁸

At a local Indian flea market, young woman who recently graduated from Cherokee High School proudly displays the woven basket purse she made in a craft class at school. She explains how she creates her purse to the people who have gathered at her booth. She states that a few elders came in and showed them how to weave baskets. They brought in white oak strips they had already cut because the class did not know how to go find the right trees in the woods to cut their own. She had never done any basket weaving until her high school class although her grandmother used to weave and cut her own strips from the trees. She explains that her mom never learned so she never learned but that a lot of her friends were beginning to weave baskets, too. She states firmly that it is very important for kids her age to keep up with the traditional crafts and she feels that they are starting to do this.⁹

Just as language and culture are inextricably entwined in the identity of modern Cherokees, so too is the ancient tradition of the warrior. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Cherokee people have a strong warrior tradition. From primary documents, such as Timberlake’s memoirs, and official United States military documents in the National
Archives, history shows that the Cherokee distinguish themselves as warriors. The Reservation’s veteran organization, “The Steve Youngdeer Post 143”, provides camaraderie and support for any Cherokee military veterans. They are proud of their sacrifices for their country and their people and are proud to be called veteran and warrior. In a public evening discussion around a campfire, some Cherokee veterans shared their views on what being a veteran is all about. One stated that being a Vietnam veteran was hard because no one but other veterans liked to talk about it. But that did not change the fact that he was proud of their sacrifices, proud that they went and fought for those people over in Viet Nam. He liked having a veteran’s post as a place to get together and keep up with each other. Another commented on the veteran’s cemetery and the project the Steve Youngdeer Post was involved in, making sure the veteran’s graves are taken care of as they were an honorable place.  

Another shared his views on Cherokee warriors and veterans today on the reservation. He told us that in the old days, the warriors took care of a lot of people and that today, the warriors still have a responsibility to our community outside of going to war. He stated that this is particularly true toward the elderly people on the reservation because they have to have someone to look after them. In the old days, warriors would bring them meat and firewood. Warriors do the same thing today – they try to make sure that any widow who is lacking has food to eat, that no one goes without fuel for heat, or they see to it that an elder has enough gas to get to the doctor. Sometimes people will come to them to help settle an argument. He felt that all of this is what a warrior at home should do.
But the Cherokee warriors, of past and present, do not look like, dance like, or act like, the warriors of the Plains or Southwest. And one Cherokee veteran commented on this dilemma during the same conversation around the campfire and felt that it was an issue as irritating as a burr under a saddle. He explained that the Cherokee ancestors never did ride horses or wear war bonnets when they had to fight as it would not have been very smart to have all those feathers on your head sticking out everywhere when you are trying to hide in the woods to surprise the enemy. He said that during his first tour of duty in Viet Nam his lieutenant asked him why he wasn’t wearing his war bonnet. That story brought a round of hefty laughter and other similar stories were told. At the end of the night, the campfire veterans expressed hope that most people knew better. 12

As one of the Tribal initiatives to revive traditions, a performance group was formed to replicate the warrior society of the Cherokee. After many months of dedicated archival and oral history research, the *Warriors of AniKituhwa*, was formed, made up of Cherokee men who dress, sing, dance and perform in the tradition of warriors. The warrior group has been officially designated as Ambassadors of the Eastern Band and they make appearances all over the country representing Cherokee history and culture. Their clothing, dance and songs are replicated from historical and anthropological literature, pictures and documents. Their main warrior song was replicated from an early wax cylinder recording of a warrior song performed by Will West Long. 13

Beyond their representation of Cherokee history and tradition to others, the members of the *Warriors of AniKituhwa* also validate their own identity as modern warriors. Some members consider themselves warriors for their people today. However,
past military service is not a requirement for membership into the *Warriors of AniKituhwa* group, as some of the members are quick to point out. Military service alone does not define warrior status. As in the past, the Cherokee warriors of today, older military veterans or younger peacetime warriors, are proud of the responsibility they assume for their people.¹⁴

The Cherokee people look to their past to construct their own modern identity. The issues briefly discussed above, the language, the history and culture and the warrior traditions, are important to that construct, indeed, imperative. They are firm in their belief that their traditions and language make them ‘Cherokee’.¹⁵

Great strides have been made by the Reservation community to present themselves as ‘Cherokee Indians’ outside of the popular notion of Indianness. The Education Department of The Museum of the Cherokee Indian takes a leading role in galvanizing the community and available resources into various endeavors to mitigate public misconceptions about the Cherokee people. The Tribe recognizes that the tourist industry plays a large part in the perpetuation of the Indian image they are struggling to overcome. By suggesting *Cherokee* over *Hollywood*, they continue to construct their own identity separate from tourist expectations, the image of the white man’s Indian, or powwow imagery.¹⁶
The Principal People

There are many changes occurring on the Reservation and within the community of Cherokee people. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian has become the catalyst for this community wide renaissance.

Together with the tribal government, the Museum provides the means, method and mechanism for many of the language, history and educational programs that are now instituted and those still on the drawing board. They also are the financial foundation and mission support for the Warriors of AniKituhwa group. Still in the planning stage is a new education and research wing that will house a public reading room, expanded archival department, classrooms for workshops, and an art and archaeology lab. Currently, they offer summer classes on Cherokee history and culture that is open to the Reservation community and the public – the enrollment is always filled quickly.

In October of 2005, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, presented an exhibit that centered on the Cherokee emissaries that traveled in 1762 to Williamsburg, Virginia. The exhibit, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Cherokee Preservation Foundation was a replication of the historic event between the Cherokee nation and the Virginia colonial government. Barbara Duncan, who spearheaded this project, said that the project was “a positive step toward portraying accurate history…the smallest detail received utmost attention. We even looked for a fabric weaver who can replicate the exact weave of the cloth used for clothes by the Cherokee delegation.” The exhibit, created from the Cherokee perspective and based on the journal of Lt. Henry Timberlake was so well received within the community and at the state level that it was
slated to open at the Smithsonian National Museum of natural History in June, 2007. This was a monumental undertaking in research and preparation that represents Cherokee history at the national level.¹⁷

In addition to the Museum, tourist attractions are an important asset on the Reservation as they represent a fair amount of financial and cultural collateral. In keeping with the program to forward Cherokee historical interests, the tribe agreed that some revisions for the outdoor drama were necessary.

The drama, “Unto These Hills” has been successful in entertaining audiences for 59 years. But the story was told with some inaccuracies that skewed the actual events. The drama was revised in 2007 with a new script, new score, and new choreography all designed to be culturally and historically accurate. The old play ended with the suggestion that the Cherokee were doomed to lose, whether they embraced or resisted the newcomers. In the newer version, “The Cherokee justly present themselves as a people with a great history and store of wisdom from long before the European arrival.” The story is told with the Cherokee-centered experience which gives the audience vivid insights into who the Cherokee people were in 1814. The revised drama is viewed with mixed emotions by the reservation community. Some like the new version, others do not – but all agree that the changes were needed so that the “Cherokee side of the story” could finally be told.¹⁸

Other areas visited by tourists are under deliberation by the Cherokee community and the Tribal Council. In downtown Cherokee, the teepees and war bonnet signs above numerous businesses have become a topic of council debate. These items are not
historically or culturally Cherokee and are now seen, to many Cherokee, as an obstacle in their effort to present proper Cherokee culture. Spurred by numerous complaints and voiced displeasure by Cherokee people over the powwow imagery displayed in Cherokee, the Tribal Council is creating an ordinance at will make businesses take down any signage of teepees and feathered war bonnets replacing them with non-stereotypical images.19

In just the last few years, all printed literature geared toward tourism on the Cherokee Reservation was redesigned to present the Cherokee Indian, as the Cherokee see themselves - not the Hollywood Indian image so prevalent in the minds of the general public. Photographs that are taken for advertisement purposes are still staged and propped, but are of actual Cherokee tribal members and have been approved by the Cherokee Tribe. For example, the Cherokee Tourism and Travel Guide booklet cover replicates an old journal of leather on which authentic Cherokee pottery designs are printed. Inside the booklet, the reader is presented with a wealth of information and historical insights, all beautifully portrayed in an attractive format. There are also pictures of Cherokee people in authentic traditional clothing, Cherokee artifacts, and pictures highlighting all the activities available to the public, all geared toward the Cherokee Indian persona. It is an advertisement that appeals to the public as well as to the Cherokee people themselves. This Cherokee designed and produced “Guide Book” has been enormously successful in promoting what the Reservation has to offer. This is in stark contrast to the 1937 Cherokee tourist booklet described in Chapter Two.20 [See Figure 12 and 13.]
It is clear that the Cherokee people are single-minded in their effort to present themselves as ‘Cherokee Indians’ and are willing to bring about changes that will best support their cultural interest while managing the economic interest at the same. The language program initiatives are gaining ground even though time marches on. The education programs in culture and history help reaffirm Cherokee ethnicity to the community and share with outsiders their unique story. The revival of the old songs, dances and warrior veneration as exemplified by the Warriors of AniKituhwa dance group, provides a performative aspect to the construction of Cherokee identity and historical representation. The goal of erasing public misconceptions is a slow but steadily progressive course as tourist attractions and businesses are held to a higher standard of historical accuracy by the Cherokee government. What new image of the Cherokee Indian will appear out of the dust of reconstruction, only time will tell, but it will be of their own making.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This thesis looks at the juxtaposition presented by the Eastern Cherokee’s struggle to present their own construct of an ‘accurate’ historical persona and that of the ‘tourist-ready Indian’ – a persona influenced by powwow imagery. First, the history of the contemporary powwow and the debates surrounding its intrinsic value to American Indians as historical representation is discussed. The historical parallels of song, dance and the warrior traditions that exist in the powwow venue and in ancient Cherokee history and tradition is established. It then becomes apparent that the powwow genre is a tool willingly embraced by Cherokee people as an economic venue in which to meet public expectations of what a ‘real’ Indian looks like. Subsequently, the influence of powwow imagery on notions of Cherokee history perceived by non-Indians is shown to directly correlate to the expectations of visitors to the Cherokee Reservation, specifically. In the final discussion, we see what the Reservation community of Cherokee people offers to the outside world as valid representations of their own history today.

Findings

In synthesizing these various components, a resolution to the premise is discernable and presents itself in several different ways. First, the influence of powwow imagery on the representation of Cherokee history and cultural identity on the reservation today is visible but only within certain sectors of the Reservation that are open to the public. Second, the renaissance of cultural and historical pride, apparent within the
Reservation community of Cherokee people, transfers to strong initiatives in securing and presenting to the public their history in creative formats.

Powwow imagery is deliberately used and very much controlled within the parameter of tourism - an important part of Cherokee economics. Eastern Cherokee do not embrace powwow culture as necessary but as a convenient venue by which to encourage tourist dollars. And, although the contemporary powwow does not stand as representative of Cherokee traditional culture, it does provides a venue for affirmation of ‘Indianess’ within the traditions of song, dance and warrior veneration. The powwow event is ascribed to at will and for a variety of purpose. Some Cherokee people go to powwows regularly as participants; some have never been to one at all. Others see powwows as economic opportunities for selling crafts or earning money as a dancer. Still others recognize it as a time of spiritual reflection and prayer for fallen warriors, the country, and their people. Subscription to the powwow culture is purely an individual choice, outside tribal history or a collective sense of being ‘Cherokee’.

However, the tribally sponsored public powwows on the Eastern Cherokee Reservation have proved to be a double-edged sword. Slicing one way, the Cherokee see increased economic gain during the tourist season. The events draw in much needed tourist dollars which not only helps individual dancers and vendors, but also helps support other worthwhile community efforts, like maintenance of the fairgrounds. Visitors who come for the powwow also have the opportunity to visit the Museum or the Indian Village and frequent other merchants downtown which equates to more tourist dollars. Slicing the other way, historical misconceptions are not only perpetuated by
powwow imagery, but encouraged, as seen in downtown Cherokee. By perpetuating the image of the Hollywood Indian, the powwow events on the Reservation help to fuel misconceptions about Indians in general and about Cherokees specifically. Non-Indian spectators who visit the reservation tend to view the powwow as a real representation of Cherokee people as they are sponsored by the Cherokee tribe and participated in by Cherokee people. And as the young boy intimated to his father in the Cherokee Museum, if there is no feathered war bonnet, whooping war cries and loin cloths, it is not “real”.

Cherokee history reveals that the white man’s Indian, expounded by Berkhofer and Deloria, is used only when it benefits the Cherokee people, as shown within the arena of tourism. The argument of Rhea’s red man’s Indian is offset by the determined effort of the Cherokee’s to present their Cherokee identity, outside of a collective “Indian” identity.

An illumination of hidden histories and the revival of ancient traditions are signs of the renewal of cultural pride on the Reservation. Outside of powwow imagery, Eastern Cherokee feel they can present other very visible and powerful displays of their own history and tribal identity. Their language and education programs, the revival of the warrior society, a growing cultural database through the Museum, and Council ordinances that facilitate changes in tourism and hold businesses to a higher standard of historical presentation, are ways the Cherokee choose to present their cultural identity and their history as a people.

Because of these extraordinary efforts, the Eastern Cherokee of the new millennium are moving forward in the struggle to transmit their own historical identity
outside of powwow imagery. In doing so, they learn to reconcile the dichotomous relationship of a tourist industry that operates on historical misconceptions. The juxtaposition created by powwow imagery and Cherokee historical representations becomes less problematic. Thus, the identity of Eastern Cherokee people, the “Ani’-Yun’wiya,” lies within their own construct of past and the future - outside the circle of the powwow.
Figure 1. Carl Standingdeer, 1925.
Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Western Carolina University.
Figure 2. Cherokee woman on the front porch of a Cherokee home, 1925. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Western Carolina University.
Figure 3. The front cover of a tourist booklet, published in 1937. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Western Carolina University.
Figure 4. Historic housing of the Cherokee Indians.

Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Western Carolina University.
Figure 5. Performance by Cherokee men dancers for tourist audience, circa 1940's. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Western Carolina University.
Figure 6. Staged photographs of Eastern Cherokee people. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Western Carolina University. Photographs circa late 1940’s.
Figure 7. Tourist postcard.
Typical postcard sold in tourist shops in downtown Cherokee, North Carolina, circa 1970s.
Figure 8. Program cover, 1951 “Unto These Hills” drama. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Western Carolina University.
Figure 9. Cherokee territorial boundaries.
This week you’re likely to see quite a few who dance to the beat of a different drum.

POWWOW

JULY 1-3

CHEROKEE
north carolina

www.cherokee-nc.com - 1.800.438.1601

The week of July 4th marks the annual Cherokee July Powwow. This is a dance competition and exhibition that will include dancers from around the country. Come and hear the expert Native American drums and experience the magnificent regalia of the indigenous representatives of several tribes throughout the U.S.

Figure 10. Advertisement for the Cherokee Powwow. Courtesy of the Cherokee One Feather.
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About the Comprehensive Cherokee Language Survey

1. What is it?
The language survey is to be step one in a five-year plan to revitalize the Cherokee language. It is a series of questions to determine the status of the language within Cherokee communities.

2. Why is it necessary?
If nothing is done, experts suggest, the language may disappear within seventy-five years. The language survey will help determine who speaks it, their ages and fluency levels, and where the highest concentrations of speakers live. This will help us to identify potential teachers, as well as encourage people to become new students of the language.

3. Who is involved?
The Cultural Resources office has enlisted the assistance of a committee of researchers from Western Carolina University, as well as a team of local community members to provide expertise about Cherokee language and culture. This Community Advisory Committee should assure the involvement of the community directly in the project.

4. Do I have to participate?
Although we encourage as many people to participate as possible, participation will be strictly voluntary. We will be calling upon a random sample of the populations of Big Cove, Big Y, Dicktown, Cherokee County, Snowbird, Wolftown, and Yellowhill. In order to get the most accurate results, we will need to contact roughly 1,300 people. Additionally, we plan to contact potential participants in advance, so no one will be caught by surprise.

5. How long will it take?
The survey should take about a half-hour to complete.

6. Will I be compensated?
For your time and participation, you will receive a $20 gift certificate to Wal-Mart.

7. Will my name be published?
All names will remain confidential. No names will be published in the results of the survey.

8. Will I be able to see the results?
The survey results will be published in the One Feather. The survey itself will be archived in the library at the Ginger Lynn Welch building.

9. Will you send Cherokee speakers to give the survey?
When we know ahead of time that the person we are surveying is a fluent Cherokee speaker, we will send a fluent speaker to give the survey.

For Further Questions or Comments, Contact:
Ben Frey
Project Assistant
Cherokee Cultural Resources
Ginger Lynn Welch Building
Phone: 497-1588

Figure 11. Advertisement for the Cherokee Language Survey. Courtesy of the Cherokee One Feather.
Figure 12. Front cover of the Cherokee Guide Booklet, 2008. Courtesy of Cherokee Tourism and Travel.
HISTORY & CULTURE

Just across a stream, the great buck grazes inside a screen of brush. You slow your breath behind your hunting mask, how ready but not drawn.

You have walked a long trail to this moment. Archery and blowgun practice since your third summer (by your eighth year, at ten faces, grasshoppers weren't safe from your darts). Then, long apprenticeship in the hunter's arts and rules. Finally, starting at age seventeen, four years of training under Adahey, the eldest hunter of your village.

Adahey revealed the true habits and spirits of the animals and birds. You learned to hate them with calls and bewitch them with masks ... to pray for good luck and give thanks for success ... to master your greed and spare game for the future. Most of all, by following the ordained cycles of fasting, sweating, and purification — and charity throughout your training, though you are lovingly married — you learned that sacrifice and focus precede glory for the hunter.

At last, your time has come. Now, the buck turns around. Slowly, surely, sniffing the wind, he steps into the clear. You pull back to full draw, and let fly.

U-ne-la-nu, s-gi! — Thank you, Creator! Soon, your whole village will feast — e-s-ga-na ni ga da tea-tec-ke ga de-ho da-na-ke-sa-ya-ni. Your wife will have hickory to make knee-boots. And together, you will seek to have a son who may follow in your footsteps.

"Friends under Fire" by Robert Griffing

Figure 13. Inside excerpt from the Cherokee Guide Booklet, 2008. Courtesy of Cherokee Tourism and Travel.
ENDNOTES

Chapter One


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10. Ellis, A Dancing People, 17.

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12. Thomas A. Britten, American Indians in World War I: At Home and at War (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 132-152;


15. Ellis, A Dancing People, 25;


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33. Mark Mattern, “The Powwow as a Public Arena for Negotiating Unity and Diversity 
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Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 160-161.

2. Ibid., 75-78

3. Ibid., 98-99.

4. *The Eastern Cherokee Indians: How They Live Today - Their History* Advertisement 
Booklet (Knoxville: J.L. Canton Publisher, 1937), 11.

5. George Frizell, interview by author, field notes, Western Carolina University Special 
Collections department, 2 July 2008.

7. *Outdoor Drama Program*, “Unto These Hills”, 1951 Season.


10. Ibid.

11. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 15 June 2008.


15. Ibid.


17. Ibid

Chapter Three

1. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 1 July 2005.

2. John Ehle, *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* (New York: Anchor Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1988), 389-392. The descendents of the Cherokee people who survived the removal to Indian Territory, now the State of Oklahoma, make up the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. They were designated by the federal government as a tribe separate from the Eastern Cherokee in 1846. This paper considers only the Easter Band of Cherokee Indians living on the reservation in North Carolina to answer the questions regarding the powwow history and Eastern Cherokee culture. However, this premise could be applied to a similar study with the Western Cherokee. Their story would be very different than the one presented here and well worth the telling.

4. Barbara Duncan, “Cherokee History and Culture,” a symposium presented by the Cherokee History and Culture Institute, Museum of the Cherokee Indian and Western Carolina University, Cherokee, North Carolina, June 27–July 2, 2005. This was relayed to the audience by a Cherokee singer at the symposium.


7. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 5 July 2005.


10. Author’s field notes, Anadarko, OK., 18 June 1999, Uncasville, CT., 8 Aug. 2000, Cherokee, N.C., 4 July 2004 and 4 July 2005. These sentiments are recounted as heard at different public powwows by many Indian people of various tribal affiliations who participate or attend other Indian powwows across the country.
11. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 4 July 2003.


15. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 15 June 2008.

16. Ibid.


18. Barbara Duncan, *Cherokee heritage Trails Guidebook*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 64-65. Dr. Duncan is currently the Education Director for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. Her knowledge of Cherokee history and culture is very visible in her capacity as an accomplished writer, educator and folklorist.

19. This illustration is written from a collection of observations of the downtown tourist areas on the Cherokee Indian Reservation during the summer months of 2006. Tourist season on the Reservation is in full swing during the months of June, July and August. Any number of Cherokee Indians can be see performing dances for tourists on the streets of down town Cherokee through out the summer months.


21. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 20 June 2008. This illustration is written from observations of the general public at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian on the Reservation.


**Chapter Four**


3. Author’s field notes, Cherokee Language Workshop at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, Cherokee Reservation, Cherokee, N.C. July 2005. These sentiments were openly relayed by various workshop participants in a public forum.

4. Ibid.

5. Cherokee Newsletter, Summer, 2006; Cherokee One Feather, July 9, 2008.

6. Ibid


8. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 21 June 2008. These comments were openly made to the public at a flea market in Cherokee.

9. Ibid.

10. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., 5 July 2005. This open discussion took place at a campground around a campfire in which the public was invited to participate.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.


15. Ibid.


17. Ibid; *Cherokee Newsletter*, Summer 2006.


19. Author’s field notes, Cherokee, N.C., July 2008.

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