Introduction

Winds of Change

I was not one of President Richard Milhous Nixon's biggest fans in 1970. A college student in Oklahoma who had recently passed his Selective Service physical, I had been reclassified 1-A (signifying the next large group set to be drafted into military service). With the Vietnam War raging hot in Indochina, and American urban ghettos and college campuses erupting with calls for a new Revolution, I—along with a host of other Americans—blamed Nixon. American citizens had so lambasted his predecessor, President Lyndon B. Johnson, for escalating the war in Vietnam that he elected not to run again for president in 1968. He may have feared for his life. Two of the most audacious political assassinations in U.S. history had occurred in the recent past—the man he succeeded as president, John F. Kennedy, was shot to death in Dallas in 1963, and Malcolm X was gunned down during the winter of 1965 in New York City.

In what must be understood in the darkest shades of irony, four days after President Johnson shocked the nation on March 31, 1968,

with his announcement that he would not seek re-election, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot dead in Memphis. The previous president's brother and most likely the Democratic candidate to succeed in Johnson's absence for his party's nomination, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, was assassinated a little more than two months later on June 5 in Los Angeles. The third choice of the Democrats, then-Vice President Hubert Humphrey, would go on to be defeated by Nixon in November 1968. One hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment technically freed slaves in the United States, marginalized, impoverished, and desperate African-Americans burned down their urban ghettos and declared themselves a separate nation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made racism a federal crime, but its caustic spirit still lingered menacingly in the land of the free and home of the brave. Although less visible before 1969 than African-Americans in media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, American Indians had also grown weary of, and frustrated with, being treated as second-class citizens.

Before the end of Nixon's first year in the Oval Office, seventy-eight American Indians, mostly college students, on November 19, 1969, began a nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island, formerly a federal penitentiary (1934-63), reclaiming the island under treaty provisions promising that titles on land formerly owned by the tribes reverted back to the tribes if the government abandoned its use of those lands.[1] On July 8, 1970, in the midst of the occupation of Alcatraz, President Nixon gave one of the most beneficial speeches made before Congress by a U.S. president regarding the rights of American Indians. In his declarations to Congress, and perhaps in the tradition

1. The provision for land title reversion is a feature of the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1868). For a complete account of the occupation of Alcatraz Island, see: Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996).

Although not publicly revered for his Vietnam War policy or especially his connections to the scandal caused by the failed burglary attempt at the Democratic Party's campaign offices at the Watergate Hotel in 1972, Richard Nixon earned credit as the first president since Franklin D. Roosevelt to take decisive steps toward reversal of injurious federal policy toward Native American tribes. In a speech to Congress in June of 1970, and true to his Quaker roots, Richard Nixon repudiated the dangerous termination era laws passed by Congress in the 1950s and 1960s. American Indians have since regained many of their rights to self-determination.

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of Indian advocacy frequently exhibited by his Quaker forbears, Nixon set a new and more favorable direction for federal policy, calling for increasing self-determination for Indian tribes, and repudiating the failed legislation of the 1950s.[2] That legislation grew from the long-standing and widely held assumption that the U.S. government would someday succeed in "terminating" its trust relationships with the Indians and in eventually assimilating the tribes into complete invisibility.[3]

Nixon told the senators and representatives they had no more right to deny American Indians their rights guaranteed by treaty and law, and backed by the U.S. Constitution, than to deny the rights of any other American citizen. He denounced the deplorable fact that less than 3 percent of healthcare and other services guaranteed by federal law based on treaty obligations to Indians were actually administered by tribal members themselves. I offer this excerpt from President Nixon's speech because his historic words signaled the beginning of the current era of healthy self-determination in Indian communities:

> I believe that both of these policy extremes are wrong. Federal termination errs in one direction, Federal paternalism errs in the other. Only by clearly rejecting both of these extremes can we achieve a policy which truly serves the best interests of the Indian people. Self-determination among the Indian people can

2. Office of the Federal Register, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon*, 1970, 564- 76.

3. The first installment of many congressional bills in the Termination Era was House Concurrent Resolution 108 (HCR-108), passed August 1, 1953. HCR-108 was a formal statement by the United States Congress announcing the official federal policy of termination. The resolution called for the immediate termination of the Flathead, Klamath, Menominee, Potawatomi, and Turtle Mountain Chippewa, as well as all tribes in the states of California, New York, Florida, and Texas. Wilkinson, Charles. *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations.* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005).

> and must be encouraged without the threat of eventual termination. In my view, in fact, that is the only way that self-determination can effectively be fostered. ... It is a new and balanced relationship between the United States government and the first Americans that is at the heart of our approach to Indian problems. And that is why we now approach these problems with new confidence that they will successfully be overcome.[4]

Chickasaw leaders, as has been generally true throughout the nation's long history, were effective in their immediate and long-term responses to Nixon's repudiations of repressive government toward Indians. Before Nixon's speech, Chickasaw Governor Overton James, along with Jess and Sadie Humes, Jonas Imotichey, Abijah Colbert and other Chickasaw elders, had been actively working against termination-era policies since their historic meeting in the fall of 1959 at the Aldridge Hotel in Ada, Oklahoma. That meeting launched a grassroots campaign to revitalize Chickasaw sovereignty.[5] Chickasaw scholar Mary Stone McClendon (more popularly known as Ataloa) denounced the termination policies in dozens of speeches, interviews and public performances all across the country between 1953 and her

4. Ibid., 576. In order to better understand the termination/paternalism policy neurosis of which Nixon speaks, compare his remarks to Congress in 1970 to the "Message of President James Monroe on Indian Removal" to the same group on January 27, 1825, as an example of "policy extremes," this one erring in the direction of paternalism: "Experience has clearly demonstrated that in their [Indians'] present state it is impossible to incorporate them in such masses, in any form whatever, into our system. It has also demonstrated with equal certainty that without a timely anticipation of and provision against the dangers to which they are exposed, under causes which it will be difficult, if not impossible, to control, their degradation and extermination will be inevitable." Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of Untied States Indian Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 39.

5. For a longer narration of the history of the Chickasaws in the twentieth century, see: Phillip Carroll Morgan, *Chickasaw Renaissance* (Ada, Oklahoma: Chickasaw Press, 2010).

death in 1967.[6] After Nixon's speech, Governor James led the way during 1973 in winning a competitive proposal to locate a new Indian Health Service hospital inside the Chickasaw Nation. The new health center would be named Carl Albert Indian Hospital in honor of the congressman from Oklahoma's Third District, in which many Chickasaws and Choctaws live and vote. Albert had publicly advocated James' proposal.[7] Albert's support carried additional weight because at the time he held the office of Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1971-77).

The hospital was a huge step forward for Chickasaws and commenced three decades of steady industry and enterprise that have measurably transformed the economy and culture of the historically impoverished south-central thirteen counties of Oklahoma within the boundaries of the Chickasaw Nation. Chickasaws currently employ more than ten thousand people in south-central Oklahoma and have created another two thousand jobs in enterprises worldwide as various as an Army-wide contract to provide its dentists, a gourmet chocolate factory, banks, and information technology companies. Besides providing a comprehensive array of general services to Chickasaw citizens, Chickasaw Nation businesses also are prosperous enough to fund cultural advancements, of which I hope this book and others by Chickasaw Press will be enduring examples.

The Chickasaw response to better federal Indian policy in the twentieth century led by Governor James was impressive, but not unprecedented. Rather, it was the result of strong leadership that is itself

6. For a biographical profile of Ataloa, see: Phillip Carroll Morgan and Judy Goforth Parker, *Dynamic Chickasaw Women* (Ada, Oklahoma: Chickasaw Press, 2011), Chapter 5. I am sorry Ataloa didn't get to hear Nixon's speech in person during the summer of 1970. In spirit, I am sure, she was sitting on the front row.

7. Richard Green, "The Origin of the Carl Albert Hospital: Applying Pressure as Needed." [http://www.chickasaw.net/history_culture/index_5580.htm].

Chickasaw political and opinion leaders up to and during the time President Richard Nixon effectively ended the federal government's policy of terminating its relationships with Native tribes included: (top row, from left) Vinnie May "Sadie" Humes, the Reverend Jesse Humes and Chickasaw Governor Overton James; (bottom row, from left) Jonas Imotichey, Abijah Colbert and Mary Stone McClendon, better known as Ataloa.

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a legacy in Chickasaw history. I am confident most readers will interpret the findings presented in this book much the same as I have. They will agree that available evidence strongly suggests that Chickasaw leaders during the nineteenth century performed ethically and responsibly in war, in diplomacy, and in educational policies. In the multiple and often deracinating transactions with their younger brother, the United States of America, their decision-making abilities appear ethically sound and well informed. I believe the reader will be intrigued to see that during and after the most important historical junctures of the nineteenth century shared with immigrant Europeans and their descendants—the American Revolution, the War of 1812, Indian Removal, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Dawes Allotment Act era—Chickasaw leaders adapting to the modern age were as skillful in honest diplomacy as they had been on the fields of battle during the two previous centuries.

My research for the past ten years has focused on the intellectual productions of Choctaws and Chickasaws in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the light of this long reach of history, *Riding Out The Storm* seeks answers to specific questions aimed at defining what might be encapsulated as Chickasaw intellectual tradition. Fundamental questions such as, "How well and under what curricula were leaders of this era educated?" and "How well were the rights of Chickasaw women represented in the transition from clan councils to a constitutional government?" needed to be addressed. Questions revealing ethical persuasions and political motives also needed to be asked, such as, "How well or how poorly did Chickasaw leaders perform during the complex and debilitating changes wrought by the westward expansion of the United States?" Based on the results of the previous questions, one might finally pose the question, "Are there identifiable trajectories we may call 'intellectual traditions' coherently

Carl Albert, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (foreground left), shares a laugh with Oklahoma and tribal dignitaries including Chickasaw Governor Overton James (foreground right), during dedication of the Carl Albert Indian Hospital in June 1980 in Ada, Oklahoma.

Chickasaw Nation Archives, Chickasaw Council House Museum

traceable from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first?" And most important, of course, "If these Chickasaw intellectual traditions can be identified, what might we learn from them?"

From the beginning of my research guided by these specific questions, it became apparent that one book would just scratch the surface of the interesting subject matter. The nineteenth century is the formative one in United States history, and the eighteenth century, of course, is the prelude to its formation. These are periods richly populated by Chickasaw and other American Indian heroes and heroines, and it is beyond the scope of any one or even many books to tell all the stories. It is my firm opinion, nevertheless—as I hope this study supports—that one cannot accurately or even usefully understand American history without a good working knowledge of how American Indians experienced these eras in our shared history.

Working with the tribe for the past five years in conducting and publishing research has been the most rewarding experience of my professional career, which includes a great deal of interesting work. To empathize with my exhilaration in helping to recover the history of Chickasaws in earlier centuries, any well-informed citizen of the United States need only ask herself how she would feel if she knew the names, Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, or even Edison and Lindbergh, but next to nothing about them, without much hope of finding them even mentioned in history textbooks. I really can't adequately put into words the sense of personal dimension and confidence I feel in knowing what I've been able to discover about my ancestors, especially in terms of how they thought, even though this knowledge remains minuscule compared to information available on the U.S. founding fathers.

Beyond becoming able simply to name, locate, and minimally

know my Indian ancestors, another pleasurable aspect of the research has been gathering a sharper set of tools with which one may be able to criticize the sparse histories written about those ancestors. Most of these histories were written by a class of historians whom I perhaps over-essentialize by calling them "settler historians"—the friendliest label I could apply to them.

I have heard many Chickasaws express gratitude, for example, to Arrell M. Gibson's book, *The Chickasaws*, published in 1971, which traces the tribe's story from prehistory to the "Death of a Nation," as his last chapter declares in its title. Gibson was a professor at the University of Oklahoma and a gifted writer who published ten books from 1963-84 about the history of Oklahoma. I have great respect overall for Gibson as an historian, and believe his reputation as a man of impeccable character. His arguments also are convincingly written. However, they often lack support for their most weighty judgments.

After I finished the first few paragraphs of the draft for this introduction, for example, toward the end of a cold winter day, my old golfing buddy, the Osage I mentioned in the preface who knows very little about his Indian ancestors, dropped by my office. He is retired, an avid reader, and was delivering some used books on Native American subjects he picked up for me at the Oklahoma City Municipal Library's annual surplus book sale. One of those volumes contained an essay, "The Colberts: Chickasaw Nation Elitism," by Arrell M. Gibson, in which he offers a scathing indictment alleging the dynasty in tribal leadership composed of Levi Colbert and his brothers during the first four decades of the 1800s was corrupt and self-serving.

Ittawamba (Levi Colbert) was the oldest son, and Tootemastubbe (George Colbert) was the second oldest son of Minta Hoya, also

known as Sopha Colbert,[8] and her husband, the Scots trader James Logan Colbert. Ittawamba and Tootemastubbe distinguished themselves in wartime alliances with the young republic, the United States of America, and in diplomacy, each serving as *miko*, or principal chief, between the late 1790s and removal in 1837-38. Two of George's and Levi's less famous younger brothers, William Colbert and James Colbert II, also served shorter terms as *mikos* during the same span of years. William was born to Nahettaly of the House of Incas-she-wa-ya[9] and James was the son of Mary Colbert, who also was presumably a member of a leadership clan.

"It is wondrous to behold the imagination, ingenuity, initiative, and courage which the Colberts and their associates brought," Gibson writes sarcastically, "to the joyous business of integrating the Chickasaw nation's productive enterprises into their shrewdly managed combine."[10] He argues in a manner in which historical details appear to be selected carefully to support his conclusion, apparently foregone in his mind, that mixed blood leaders were corrupt by their very nature, and that their goals in life were to fleece and mislead the "innocent full bloods." These judgments of the capacities of mixed- and full-blood citizens alike fairly reek of racist assumptions, operating perhaps on a subconscious level in Gibson's mind. "More like their Anglo fathers than their Indian mothers, the mixed bloods better understood

8. I believe the name Minta Hoya is contracted and then somewhat Anglicized from the words *aminti*, which means "source, origin, or the place from which anything comes," and *ohoyo*, which means "woman." In some genealogies her name is also listed as Mintahoyo House, which is the more correct appellation, in my opinion. Mintahoyo House may be correctly translated as "House of the First Woman."

9. Incas-she-wa-ya probably derives from word, *inchashwa*, which means "sinews of the small of the back." Research has not yet revealed the significance of this term, but I am confident that the House of Inchashwa was a leadership lineage.

10. H. Glenn Jordan and Thomas M. Holm, *Indian Leaders: Oklahoma's First Statesmen* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1979), 82.

the ways of Frenchmen, Britishers, Spaniards and later Americans," Gibson opines. "They were more assertive than their full blood counterparts and came to comprise an aristocracy in the tribe."[11] These judgments wouldn't offend me as much if I could find a single shard of evidence, essentially among the same sources Gibson consulted, to support his accusations against the Colberts, or of his suggestion that full bloods were not quite up to speed. Among a multitude of other fundamental errors in interpretation, Gibson completely fails to understand that the Colberts came to power and held high status *because* of their mothers' lineage, rather than despite it, as he seems to be suggesting. Their white father, James Logan Colbert, though loyal to tribal interests by all accounts available to me, was relatively insignificant in terms of their status as leaders.

I have been, and I'm sure I will be, accused of tribally biased, boosterish interpretations in reading the same sources differently from Gibson, as if it were my goal to make all my ancestors into "good guys." I admit that I may be happier than average to find an ancestor whom I regard as heroic, but I also like to think that I am a big enough boy to swallow the Castor oil of finding out that some of my potential heroes were crooks. "It was a natural progression for the Colbert-led mixed bloods, masters of the Chickasaw nation economy, to extend their dominion over the tribal government," Gibson asserts.[12] The "natural progression" the historian is referring to, I shudder to surmise, means that the *naturally superior* cunning of the white man, an assumption I encounter frequently among Gibson's generation of settler historians, *naturally* trumps indigenous blood in every instance wherein the two become mixed.

11. Ibid., 79.

12. Ibid., 84.

I pursue this personally repugnant criticism of Oklahoma historian forebears while fully conscious of the risk I run of being so judged. I accept that risk in favor of the chance to illustrate the principle that point of view and cultural bias are always present in the writing of history, and I certainly do not hesitate to admit that I, too, have biases. The fact that my biases are obviously different from Gibson's should suggest that what you're about to read is a significant revision of the histories of American Indians we have had to rely on for so long, many of which happily are being replaced by a newer generation of tribal histories written by members of the respective tribes.

"Riding out the storm," as a metaphor, broadly describes the frequently catastrophic winds, rains, snows and thunderbolts of change that have raked through Indian Country since the advent of European colonization in the Americas. More specifically, the title refers to the storms and upheavals of nineteenth-century Chickasaw life as encountered by the three political leaders profiled in this volume.[13] Because of the paucity of published historical detail about these individuals as interpreted through the standard histories penned by settlers, I chose a somewhat experimental model to follow in this study. I decided to approach the lives of the governors as if I were doing primary research—as if nothing had been written about these men. This model therefore includes a redirected examination of some well-known historical documents, treaties and personal writings, for example, coupled with an attempt to create cultural contexts through literature relevant to the governors' life histories, the goal being to breathe some life into their stories and to avoid the inevitable aridity of third-person listings of events and dates.

13. To a lesser degree, *Riding Out The Storm* also aspires to mediate some of the winds of change, blowing through the academic community, regarding how that community approaches issues of credible history-writing as well as the movement toward more tribally specific criticism of Native American literature.

Toward that end, the first chapter tells the story of Governor William Leander Byrd, the most recent of the three, because tracing his patrilineal lineage back to Virginia colony in 1674 permits me to present the important back-story of the American Indian tribes' experience of the colonial wars between the 1670s and 1740. Again, I stress that understanding the tribal experience of the colonial wars is fundamental to any useful view of American history. From there, "The Maze of Colonialism: The Byrds of Virginia and Indian Territory," experiments with an unusual approach to interpreting the political life of William L. Byrd. The complicated genealogy of Governor Byrd, whose father's line descended from Virginia colonial aristocracy, but who was born to a Chickasaw mother of a leadership clan, serves to illuminate some of the intricacies of the progression of empire though the Americas, a transit predicated upon disenfranchising American Indian tribes and attempting to negate their histories. This progression of the American neo-colonial enterprise is exposed by focusing on Byrd's tempestuous 1888 campaign for the office of governor, during the year after Congress passed the Dawes Allotment and Severalty Act, and by examining that historical moment through the lens of indigenous political theory presented by Governor Byrd's great-great-grandniece, Jodi A. Byrd, in her 2011 book, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism.*[14]

The transit of empire in the Americas famously includes many appropriations of the Chickasaws' and other tribes' *mythos*, personalities, places, and history, and this style of appropriation is nowhere else more dramatically demonstrated than within Nobel Prize laureate William Cuthbert Faulkner's world-famous fictional creation of Yoknapatawpha County, which I explore in the second chapter. Yok-

14. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

napatawpha County was undoubtedly drawn from Chickasaw Governor Cyrus Harris's birthplace and family home, the well-known northern Mississippi estate, Yakni Patafa. Cyrus Harris, arguably the most popular Chickasaw politician of the nineteenth century, was elected to the governorship five times between 1856 and 1878. The life and career of Harris are examined more for the framework they provide to help us understand his life in northern Mississippi during the period before removal in 1837 than for developing his experiences in Indian Territory. The chapter is titled "Blizzards of Coincidence: Cyrus Harris and William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County," and serves a literary critical purpose as much as a biographical one. The evidence I have uncovered regarding the family history of novelist and Nobel laureate William Faulkner challenges the widely held view in Faulkner scholarship, and promoted by Faulkner himself, that he made up from his imagination the Indian characters and motifs in his novels and short stories, predominantly set in a fictional version of his native northern Mississippi neighborhood. This is the same neighborhood in which Cyrus Harris was born and raised in the early 1830s, and in which Faulkner's ancestors lived at that time. My research suggests a much more conscious use by Faulkner of Choctaw and Chickasaw subject matter in constructing his characters and the fictional geography of Yoknapatawpha County. This essay is, to the extent of my knowledge, the first published Chickasaw reading of Faulkner.

The third chapter, "Tempest in the Territory, Winchester Colbert and the Crucibles of War," charts the interesting life history of Winchester Colbert, who was born in the homelands near *Tollama-Toxa* (Cotton Gin Port) right before the War of 1812 and who matured during the American Civil War while he served as Chickasaw governor from 1862-66. Winchester Colbert's character was undoubtedly

forged in these crucibles of war. Chickasaws' and other American Indians' experiences of the War of 1812, the American Civil War, and current wars have been largely ignored or overlooked in accounts of American history. The Chickasaws formed important alliances with the young United States and made critical contributions to her very survival. In this most ambitious chapter in the book, I situate considerations of major events in Colbert's life in comparison to selected works from the large genre of Native American writing about war, most prominently with Geary Hobson's 2011 collection of short stories set during the Vietnam War, titled *Plain of Jars and Other Stories*.[15] I present research on the leadership of *mikos* Piomingo and Levi Colbert during the crucial period between the American Revolution and the removal treaties, which represents a substantial departure from what I regard as common misinterpretations by historians such as Gibson. This chapter endeavors further to illuminate how citizens of Indian Territory experienced the devastations of the American Civil War and its immediate aftermath.

Riding Out the Storm does its best to bring into the light, by way of fair biographical treatment, these three nineteenth-century Chickasaw governors, each unique and interesting, but woefully under-served in the annals of American history. Obscured within the historical narratives of America penned by settler-culture historians, but empowered by a combination of excellent classical educations and traditional diplomacy, these men led their people in weathering the damaging storms of uninvited change wrought by colonial and neo-colonial intrusions upon their territories and culture. The overarching objective of this study, to identify and define the intellectual legacy of previous generations of Chickasaws as received by my own, led me to some

15. Geary Hobson, *Plain of Jars and Other Stories* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011).

conclusions I could not have predicted. Those conclusions are set forth in the final chapter, "Enlightenment and Thunder in Chickasaw Intellectual Tradition." The following quotation is attributed to the controversial Arkansas soldier, poet, Freemason, and politician Albert Pike, who negotiated during the summer of 1861 on behalf of the Confederacy for treaties of alliance with the nations of Indian Territory. Pike pursued his diplomatic mission after Union troops abandoned their forts in the Territory during the early days of the war, and his poetic reflections seem peculiarly appropriate here:

> We must pass through the darkness, to reach the light. That which causes us trials shall yield us triumph: and that which makes our hearts ache shall fill us with gladness. The only true happiness is to learn, to advance, and to improve: which could not happen unless we had commenced with error, ignorance, and imperfection.[16]

Much like the encouraging reappearance of clear skies emerging after the gray-black clouds of stormy weather have finally exhausted themselves, we find Chickasaws and other indigenous kinship societies still alive and getting well after several centuries of bitter struggle in the Americas. It is my hope that this study represents just such a passage through darkness and just such a reach for learning and light.

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16. Albert M. Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Richmond, Virginia: L. H. Jenkins, 1920), 240.