# ARROWS TO ARCHIVES: GATHERING OKLAHOMA STORIES

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ABSTRACT

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Using the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial statehood celebrations and the rhetorical practices used in the ephemera created for visitors to the state as a focus, this archivally-informed dissertation is about stories told by the artifacts, and stories that are left out. It is about the stories of Oklahoma, and about the cowboy and Indian tales that are told about the state. It is about the stories of my home and my life living between two cultures in Oklahoma and in my own body. This is a story about events in Oklahoma and the stories that the events and the land they took place on can tell. This is a story about history and progress, and it is one that I have been wanting to tell for a long time.

By looking at these artifacts through a Cultural Rhetorics lens and methodology, I will show the ways that specific acts of curation and composing can shape an understanding of a people and of a place and how those people and places shape the stories that are told, and how an Indigenously informed Cultural Rhetorics archival approach to data collection can facilitate the untangling of stories from curated bullshit. Further, I will show how storytelling can be used as a decolonial method for conducting an object analysis on archival materials to draw out the underlying meanings behind damaging and ongoing narrative histories

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I want to take this space to deeply and sincerely thank all of the people who have helped to guide me on this journey. It is dedicated to my academic mentors and committee members: Kristin Arola, who skillfully guided me through the mess and listened to my rants over the last year. Malea Powell, whose unbelievable generosity and knowledges have been instrumental in my actually finishing this project. Danielle DeVoss, who is always happy to help, even when I show up with a giant list of things, and Alexandra Hidalgo, who has consistently encouraged me to keep myself in my research and to make more beautiful things.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my friends, family, and loved ones who have stood by me and listened to me as I have spent countless hours on this project. Especially to my partner, Ezekiel, who has read this piece maybe as many times as I have, and who has been unbelievably supportive of me as I have struggled and cussed this thing.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

A note (and content warning) about terms:

Throughout this project, there are some terms that I will use interchangeably, and others that I will use for specific purposes. In reference to the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial, there are a few different spellings for the event that were seen in the archival materials. For my own words, I will always use the hyphenate version of the spelling, but others may appear in images and quotes through the project.

Since the primary objects of inquiry for this project were produced during the 1950s, there are several instances of racial slurs used to refer to Indigenous peoples. I will keep these all in their original form as their use in itself is a rhetorical act worthy of further discussion. I will also use a few interchangeable terms for Indigenous people in this document. In my home in Oklahoma, "Indian" is the most commonly used way that we refer to ourselves. While I understand that this is a term that has a very different social and political weight within other Indigenous communities, it is what I think of myself as, and I will use it, along with "Native" and "Indigenous" people to refer to both what I am discussing in the data objects from the archives as well as the Indigenous peoples of Oklahoma.

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*"Oklahoma is really exceptional only because it encapsulates so much American history within its borders, revealing much about how the struggle over land has given shape to the way Americans – indigenous, black, and white – created and gave meaning to races and nations"*

(Chang *The Color of the Land* 1)

Places have an identity. It is shaped by the history of the people and the actions that have defined the place. I am from Oklahoma. I was born and raised in the heart of the Cherokee Nation, my tribal community, and I am proud of where I am from. Even though there are arguably many problems with the state, it is my home and the place from which generations of my family have come, both willingly and forced. It's a state where the politics are as red as the dirt, but it is also a beautiful place, from the Great Plains to the foothills of the Ozark mountains, Oklahoma has many sights to see and stories to tell.

Oklahoma, as David Chang said in the quote above, can be seen as a kind of micro version of the entire United States. It is in the center (heartland) of the country and intersected by mighty roads, including the Mother Road, Route 66, tying the state to the rest of the country. It is a place of coming together and mixing, and one of the most historically significant coming togethers in Oklahoma is that of the different Indigenous peoples and the other citizens of the state. Pre-Statehood, Oklahoma was Indian territory, and it is still home to over 50 tribal nations. Oklahoma's native population is an important part of the way that the state represents itself. However, the story of the relationship between the state and the Indigenous population is a very complicated and often tragic one, directly tied into the history of the state; it is a story of broken treaties and stolen land that is often overwritten by one of pioneers and the conquering of the frontier. The cowboys and Indians story of Oklahoma can be seen all over the state, and it is one

version of that story, one place that story was told, one that I couldn't get out of my head that this work concerns.


*Figure 1 Milk Glass Trinket Dish from the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: 1907-1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Exposition Arrows to Atoms with an image of the state of Oklahoma pierced by and arrow with an image of an atom. Personal Collection*

*This is a story.*

It all started with a trinket dish. A trinket dish with Oklahoma and an arrow pierced through an atom. When I paid the $3 for that dish all those years ago, I had no idea that it would be the catalyst for something that I would spend hundreds of hours on, but it did, and now I find myself here now, 1000 miles away from where I found it, writing a much bigger story than one about a dish. However, the story of the dish is important, too, so here it is.

I love junk. I love to collect all of the little things that turn up at flea markets and antique sales. I love to see the things that people found important enough to tuck away for generations, only to have them sold off to strangers years later. I say that I am a very enthusiastic collector of everything, but in reality, I am more like a raven, filling my nest with all of the interesting, shiny things of this world. Over the years, I have had to curate my nest, culling down to only specific types of things, if only to make the semi-nomadic academic life I have chosen more realistic (how many large plastic tubs containing only antique office supplies is it okay and acceptable to move 1000 miles? Apparently, 3.)

Oklahoma is a place of both deep seeded traditions and one of movement and transition. Because of these things, the junk that washes up onto the tables and shelves of second-hand spaces is always an incredible mix of a little bit of everything from everywhere, especially, unsurprisingly from Oklahoma itself, and anything vintage and Oklahoma related is always on my radar. I have a complicated love/hate relationship with the place from which generations of my family have come; I struggle with knowing why one whole side of my family lived there (forcefully moved on the Trail of Tears), and I also have an immense amount of semi-defensive pride about being from Oklahoma. On the day I found the dish, I was looking for nothing in particular, just spending a day wandering around the Saturday flea market in the Tulsa expo center (as with all stories, the place in which it took place is important later.) The dingy little dish with its gold edging caught my eye (mid-century glass made the cut for collectables). I was immediately curious about the logo, and after I bought it and got home, I set to a little googling to discover more. As search for “Oklahoma Arrow and Atom” led me promptly to the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial events and the slogans “Arrows to Atoms” and “Tepees to Towers” (The dish pictured above is not the original dish I found. The original’s text had all

rubbed away; it is safely packed away. The one above is another of the same kind I found that has the text.)

I was immediately obsessed. I started scouring eBay, antique stores, and estate sales for anything related to the event. I asked about it so frequently that a woman whose estate sales I often visited called me the "Centennial Lady'" and started setting things aside for me. I now have a robust collection of trinkets and ephemera from the events. I have everything from pamphlets and coasters to stoneware dishes and large metal wall hangings. Like I said, a collector. For me, these things are so fascinating because of the story about Oklahoma that they tell. I collect stories with the same enthusiasm that I collect old staplers. I want to have them. I want to explore them and try them out on things to see how they work. Stories are and have always been one of the most important things in my life because they are how I came to know both myself and the world around me, and this was a story I could not get out of my head.

This archivally-informed dissertation is about those stories, and those that are left out, using the 1957 Oklahoma statehood celebrations and the rhetorical practices used in materials created for visitors to the events as rhetorical artifacts. It is about the stories of Oklahoma, and about the cowboy and Indian tales that are told about the state. It is about the stories of my home and my life living between two cultures in Oklahoma and in my own body. This is a story about an event in Oklahoma and the stories that the event and the land they took place on can tell. This is a story about history and progress, and it is one that I have been wanting to tell for a long time.

By looking at these artifacts through an Indigenously informed Cultural Rhetorics lens and methodology, I will show the ways that specific acts of curation and composing can shape an understanding of a people and of a place and how those people and places shape the stories that are told, and how this approach to data collection can facilitate the untangling of stories from

curated nonsense. Further, I will show how story gathering can be used as a decolonial method for conducting an object analysis on archival materials to draw out the underlying meanings behind damaging and ongoing narrative histories

**This Project and Its Parts**

Primarily focusing on notions of representation and commodification, this dissertation will discuss how the statehood events created a rhetorical location intended to encapsulate a specific narrative for visitors. Further, I will show how the Oklahoma statehood celebrations offer a narrowed and manageable view of something that is more relevant to the larger picture in rhetoric and composition, the analysis of specific one-time events that represent the stories of a specific moment. When an event is carefully curated to be representative of a particular place, time, or people, the event itself and its ephemeral nature create a "storied place," a snapshot of a story that is being told about the place or people, and this consideration can be employed in spaces far beyond Oklahoma.

This introductory chapter will serve not only to introduce the project and the scholars and texts that have informed it, but also to tell the story of the Semi-Centennial as it was told in the artifacts I have gathered over the years and specifically for this project, and the archival and other sources I sought to produce this dissertation. Like the story of finding the dish and the hunt that it led me on, researching and crafting this project has been an exploration into stories about my home that are sometimes uncomfortable, and part of the impetus for this project was creating a space in which to explore and unpack that discomfort. In order to help work through the discomfort and my own conflicting feelings about the event and my enduring interest in both owning pieces of the events and in uncovering the missing stories, in each of the following chapters, I am beginning my discussion with an image of a piece from my personal collection of

items and ephemera from the Semi-Centennial. In these beginning sections I am also sharing some of the stories about coming to this research and the experiences I had while conducting the archival portion. I am doing this not only in interest of positioning myself as a researcher and collector, but also as a way to include my Oklahoma stories into this gathering.

The following chapter discusses the methodologies and methods that I took into the archives and in my analysis. Many of the texts that helped to shape and inform this project are more comfortably situated in Indigenous Studies than they are overtly part of the Cultural Rhetorics discussion. However, the nature of Cultural Rhetorics, and its inclusion of a variety of voices from many disciplines and knowledge making communities, allows me to see the ways in which these knowledges and methods *constellate* to create a more rounded and complete analysis of the stories that I collected in the archives. Specifically, Cultural Rhetorics reminds us that, "It's especially important to understand that those in the field of cultural rhetorics do not see 'cultural rhetorics' as some hidden code for non-Western rhetorical practices; instead, it is an approach that recognizes and honors the cultural specificity of all rhetorical practices/productions" (Powell and Bratta "Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversation" *Intro*). By drawing from my own experiences as an Indigenous Oklahoman, from the archival material, and the theoretical guidance of those scholars who have come before me, I am able to bring together all of these knowledges in order to attempt to tell these Oklahoma stories.

Once I have established how I came to making the knowledges for this dissertation, I will begin the actual analysis of the stories that the objects told. In chapter 3, "Telling Indian Tall Tales: Native Identity as Seen Through the Semi-Centennial," I turn my analytical lens to land itself, and to the stories that are told about it. The history of Oklahoma is one that has been Roger and Hammersteined for the public since statehood, and the Semi-Centennial is no different. This

chapter will discuss the history of Oklahoma as seen through the event in juxtaposition to the far more bloody and dark reality of the state.

Then in that chapter, I move on to discuss how specifically curated narratives of a time and a place creates a "storied place," a place of created history made specifically to promote a specific narrative and rhetorical agenda. Theses storied places are not exclusive to the spaces made in Oklahoma or at the Semi-Centennial; instead, they are found in many places of historical importance and in specific events in order to tell a story, often at the loss of the rougher parts of the real history.

After I have established the ways in which the setting of these stories has been rhetorically created, I will then look to the people in that story. Chapter 4 of this dissertation is about the ways in which Indigenous Identity was created and invoked for the Semi-centennial. In order to explore the ways in which Native folks were represented at the events, I looked at both the images and text that discussed or feature Native themes or imagery and discuss the story that is being told in these objects, and in turn were told at the events. The images and text that I discuss come primarily from brochures and magazines made for the event, but I also pay special attention to a series of advertisements that I found in newspapers from the time. In these, there is an ongoing theme in which it is clear that Indigenous practices and ways of knowing/doing are being used as a way to show the modern and progressive products and services as something far more advanced.

The final chapter of this dissertation winds the clock forward, and I turn my focus to the current climate and practices of Oklahoma and its Native Residents and the ways in which the invocation of the Semi-centennial continues in the state today, and how it is antithetical to the reality of contemporary Indigenous life. Recently, there has been a noticeable increase in the

circulation of some of the more sinister parts of Oklahoma's history through surprising popular culture sources. These histories often butt up against the narrative of the state that is firmly planted in a time past, in some cases, similar to that of the Semi-Centennial.

**Arrows to Atoms: The 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Celebrations**


*Figure 2 Cover of a Souvenir Program from the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Exposition June 14th-July 7th State Fairgrounds Oklahoma City, Oklahoma with images of stylized fairgrounds with the OKC Skyline, Oil Derricks, and Teepees 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, OKC, OK*

I want to take a moment to tell the story of the events that resulted in the making of the little dish that ended up eventually inspiring this project. Much like Oklahoma itself, it was a

weird and wild thing that was both wonderful and spectacularly horrible, so here is a little about it. In 1957, the state of Oklahoma held grand Semi-Centennial events in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. These events, along with other smaller celebrations across the state, marked the progress that Oklahoma had made in the 50 years since statehood. The main exposition was an atomic age extravaganza featuring acts and entertainment from around the globe, demonstrations of the newest technology, homes of the future, and food and fun for the whole family. Despite a powwow and "buffalo BBQ" as featured events, taglines for the celebrations boasted that in the 50 years it had been a state, Oklahoma had gone from "Arrows to Atoms" and from "Teepees to Towers," and brochures from the events, as seen above, feature mid-century style drawings of teepees dwarfed by oil derricks and powerlines. These slogans and images seem to suggest that Oklahoma's progress was being measured by its move away from its native roots, that the arrows and teepees are the past, and that atoms and towers are its future.

According to the Oklahoma Historical Society's *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma:*

> In 1957 Oklahomans commemorated fifty years of statehood with events scheduled between April 22 and November 16, 1957. These dates were chosen because the first land run in present Oklahoma had occurred on April 22, 1889, and statehood had taken place on November 16, 1907." It goes on to say, "As the primary goal of the celebration was to attract visitors to Oklahoma, slogans included 'Visit Oklahoma First' as well as 'Arrows to Atoms' and "From Tepees to Towers. ("Semi-Centennial").

The sloganing for the event was the first thing that I found and caught my attention about this event, "Arrows to Atoms" and "From Tepees [sic] to Towers." This seemed like such strange choices to my contemporary Indigenous Oklahoman eyes. I immediately had questions about them.

The invocation of atoms in a staunchly oil state with no connection to or history of nuclear power seemed even more out of place than that of the teepees in a state where they were not a common sight. When going into the archives to gather data for this project, one of my primary goals was to find the origins of these slogans and for the emblem of the event (See fig. 1). In my mind, I envisioned a table of cigar smoking 1950s oil executives gathered around a table, trying to scheme together a way to milk Oklahoma's Indigenous history to sell to families coming to the event. However, the reality is that it was nothing so sinister. What I discovered was that it was a write-in newspaper contest. Something that an Oklahoman suggested to a committee. When I read this in the fact book for the event, pictured below, I was unsure of how I felt. Is it worse if there was an intentional framing of native imagery as something of the past, something to progress away from, or that somewhere in Oklahoma someone just thought "arrows to atoms" and "tepees to towers" sounded cute? Did this person, who surely knew community members of native descent, think about how it sounded?


*Figure 3 Cover of the Press, Radio, and Television Fact Book. Text reads: Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Exposition Oklahoma City June 14th-July 7th featuring the Semi-Centennial Arrow and Atom Logo with the dates June 14th-July 7th 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, OKC, OK*

Beyond the slogans, once I started looking more deeply into the event, I found that at the main events in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, there were specifically named "Indian" attractions that featured *authentic Indians* doing *authentic Indian stuff.* Knowing that Oklahoma has long been the home of dozens of individual and unique Native nations, I wondered how all of these people were represented at this celebration of the State, its history, and its people.

This is where this dissertation picks up, working to fill in the gaps about the stories that were told at the event and those that were left out. This research has grown from a hobby and a collection into something that is so much more. And while I acknowledge that I am only one person, and that I can only tell these stories through my own lens of understanding and the

knowledges of those who have informed and inspired me, I am offering my best and to share more of these stories and those events to those who wish to hear them.

## Chapter 2: Gathering Stories: Cultural Rhetorics Informed Archival Collecting


*Figure 4 Photograph of the front side of a green Frankoma stoneware trivet Text reads: 1907 Oklahoma 1957 Arrows to atoms featuring an image of an atom pierced by an arrow with an outline of the state of Oklahoma at the center. Personal Collection*

*After I found the trinket dish that inspired this research, I began my years long journey of collecting other little bits and bobs from the Semi-Centennial events. Some of the things I have collected, I ran across at estate sales and second-hand shops, while others I actively hunted for. Of those that I had to hunt down, none gave me more trouble than the special edition trivet made by Oklahoma stoneware maker, Frankoma. I have a special relationship with Frankoma; I have inherited around 400 pieces of the dishes from various family members, and I have a lifetime's worth of memories of eating off the heavy plates made from the red dirt of Oklahoma. When I learned that there was a Frankoma piece made special for the events, I had to have it. I set up*

*eBay alerts, I hounded shop owners and estate sale managers, but I just couldn't find it. Eventually, after over a year of searching, I did find the trivet of my desires sitting forgotten on a shelf in a small antique store in a small town along route 66 and added it to my collection.*


*Figure 5 Back side of a green Frankoma Stoneware trivet Text reads: In less than a lifetime Oklahoma has come from pioneers to world leaders... from horses to airliners. teepees to towers. Arrows to atoms. 1907-1957 Frankoma Semi-Centennial Celebration. Personal Collection.*

*In many ways, the quest for the trivet was very much like the one that I went on into the archives. I knew what I wanted to find, the stories that were left out, but I didn't have much hope about actually finding them since the search up to that point had proved fruitless. I clearly remember walking into the Oklahoma Historical Society archives for the first time, the formal beginning of this research journey. As I walked into the imposing building in Oklahoma City, I looked down at the path leading into the building and saw that it was marked with brass insets, showing a timeline of Oklahoma. I had run from my car onto the sidewalk at the 1890 plaque in*

*the pouring rain. It was the kind of rainstorm that happens out on the plains in the winter time, a deep soaking, the land already preparing for the spring, regardless of the city that had grown on top of it. For me, at that moment, it just meant wet sneakers, but even in the downpour, I took the time to read the markers as I made my way into the archive, to watch a little piece of my home's history unfold beneath my feet as I made my way into the place that claimed to hold its stories. So much of the impetus for this project has been driven by specific locations in Oklahoma. The market where I found the dish, in the same space that Tulsarama happened, Oklahoma itself and my deep connection to it, and the archival spaces that I visited.*

**Gathering Stories**

In this methodological chapter, I describe the ways in which I wove together Indigenous and Western rhetorical research methodologies to conduct the gathering (literal methods) and interpreting (methodology) of the stories that the archival materials for the Semi-Centennial had to tell. Just as Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states in *Decolonizing Methodologies, "*The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful" (1). The *how* of research is just as important as what you find and thinking of the work through a Cultural Rhetorics informed Indigenous methodology offered me the tools to best tell the stories that I sought to tell. As I mentioned in the introduction, the stories that I went into find were often troubling stories about the Indigenous peoples of Oklahoma, and as a mixed-blood Oklahoman, and as an Indigenous rhetorician, the how of my *research* and how I went about discussing the ways in which these events and objects told the story of Oklahoma was important to me. My story is directly wrapped in with that of the state, and I must be responsible to both stories.

With this chapter, I lay out the scholarly voices that helped to guide me through the gathering (literal methods) and analysis of the artifacts that I found in the archival spaces at the Oklahoma City and Tulsa Historical Societies, the only places where I could find any stored collection of artifacts from Oklahoma's Semi-Centennial events. Further, I discuss how these knowledges helped me to articulate the ways in which I was able to sort these objects into manageable themes, the ways in which I am using story and story gathering in my methodology, and ways in which these scholars helped me to understand the impact that the preconceptions and knowledges from my lived experience as an Indigenous Oklahoman. This reflection on myself and my positionality in this research practice is my first discussion point, and I then move onto the different methodological approaches that have guided my research.

Understanding that the written histories and images that I found in the archives are artifacts of an era not known for its "wokeness," there is still weight that can be lent to the ways in which they still have a sort of power. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson discusses the challenges of this kind of" fixed history" that I faced can cause when he says, "Writing ideas down fixes them as objects that can be taken out of context of time and relationship. As fixed objects, ideas lose the ability to grow and change, as those who hold relations with the ideas grow and change themselves. They lose their relational accountability" (*Research is Ceremony* 123). The stories about the amicable Indians willingly moving West, as seen in the history books of my childhood and in the materials from the Semi-Centennial are part of a created ideal version of the West. Like in the Wilson quote, the act of writing something down (or in the case of the centennial materials, photographing or drawing) fixes them in time, and it can be difficult to uncover any truths that may have been erased or hidden. And that is where I have found myself as I have worked through this project. I was left to do this research without the relational accountability to

the peoples of which these events and documents discuss. However, I was able to consider the data that was in the archives through the knowledges and relationships that I have received from my own academic and Indigenous communities and look for those special and rare places where those knowledges can come together in my analysis of these artifacts.

My methodological practices are informed by many Indigenous voices, and the knowledge that was shared by these scholars helped me understand how to best approach the actual methods of story gathering. While there are many Indigenous voices, both in Indigenous studies and Cultural Rhetorics, who have helped me to best articulate this project, there were some in both fields that had the most influence in how I considered this project.

Firstly, Kathleen Absolon's *Kaandossiwin* is a text that I have found myself turning to repeatedly in my research in how to approach the actual methods that I employed in my story gathering, both for this project and in my other work as well. In her dissertation turned manuscript, Absolon explores the ways in which Indigenous communicative practices can be used to conduct academic research that takes into careful consideration both the researcher and the participants in an interview-based data collection methodology. As I went into the archives in order to *gather* the stories in order to share them, rather than to just *collect* them for analysis, Absolon and the ways that she weaves in the berry gathering methods that she learned as a child into her interview collecting methods, offers me the actual *methods* of my research more than the *methodology* I needed to analyze what I found.

Early in the text, Absolon makes a point to clearly make the connection to the ways the knowledges I brought into the archives informed my gathering, saying, "Indigenous re-search is often guided by the knowledge that is found within" (12). Like I have worked to do with this project, Absolon blends together a narrative of her own experience growing up within her

Indigenous community along with conversations with other Indigenous scholars and their research, and then discusses how these experiences shaped how she understands both the search for knowledge and how the search can and should be conducted. I found a deep connection to the ways in which she felt a community responsibility to do research that upheld her community values.

Absolon's outline of her Indigenous methodological practices was immensely helpful in my understanding of the ways in which my research was affected by my understandings and the environments in which it took place. Using a metaphor of a flower, Absolon breaks down her research methodology into the parts of the flower with different parts of the research:

> roots: foundational elements
>
> flower centre: self as central to the search
>
> leaves: the journey, process, transformation
>
> stem: methodological backbone & support
>
> petals: ways of searching
>
> environment: academic context. (*Kaandossiwin)*

Absolon explores how she conducted research that took into careful consideration both the researcher and the participants in an interview-based data collection methodology. This was extremely helpful to how I considered my positionality when conducting my story gathering in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa archives. She reminds the reader that as Indigenous researchers, "We can't dismantle colonized forms of knowledge production using colonial methodologies; we need to both develop a critique and then turn our gaze toward Indigenous tools and knowledge" (97-98). In my research methodology, I carefully considered ways in which I could move away

from the colonial methodologies and turn my research lens instead to a method that held closer to an Indigenous understanding of knowledge and knowledge making.

**Indigenous Methodological Practices and Positionality: Researching like an Indian**

The researcher plays an integral part to the research, not just in the sense that they are the ones conducting the research, but also in the ways in which they influence the understandings and approaches to the process. My positionality as an Indigenous person, especially an Indigenous Oklahoman, is important to the ways in which I interpret the data that I found. For me, this position meant that I had to take on the role of gathering and interpreting the stories and artifacts that I found with a consideration of the community relationality that guides my life and my research. The community accountability that I have for not only the stories about Indigenous folks, but also about my home, helps me to look at what I collected with an understanding of the power I am bringing into this space as an interpreter of these stories.

My positionality as an Indigenous Oklahoman researcher is directly related to my understanding of relationality and how I considered my community and home relationality. Relationality is an important part of conducting research through a Cultural Rhetorics informed Indigenous methodology; this can be seen in the ways in which Andrea Riley Mukavetz discusses the role of positionality/relationality and an embodied research practice built through community and her understanding of "there-ness" in her article, "Towards a cultural rhetorics methodology: Making research matter with multi-generational women from the Little Traverse Bay Band." In the piece, she explains the ways in which she practices relationality in her rhetorical work, saying, "To do cultural rhetorics work is to value the efforts and practices used to make and sustain something and use that understanding to build a theoretical and methodological framework that reflects the cultural community a researcher works with" (110).

The archives that I visited are in my home and the places where the history of the state is gathered for the future. I felt a need to do right by my home and my communities by remembering the ways in which the relationships I have built impacted my analysis. The idea of how relationality plays into conducting academic research that maintains community accountability is also discussed by Shawn Wilson when he tells us:

> ...to me and indigenous research methodology means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you're answering to all your relations when you were doing research. You're not answering questions of validity reliability are making judgments a better worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. (177)

In the Historical Society archival spaces in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, I was surrounded by stories of people who were members of communities, some of which I am also a member; I was standing in places where some of the events took place, and still, I felt so separated from the work, and I believe that the feeling of separation came from the absence of that relationality to which Wilson was referring. The world around me in the archives was no less curated than the events themselves. Here was Oklahoma history set out along a very specific narrative path (like the sidewalk leading up to the archives in Oklahoma City that were inset with brass plaques that showed the history of Oklahoma, at least a version of it.)

My understanding of the relations between settler and Indigenous people, not just in Oklahoma, but in the US as a whole, was informed primarily through my own lived experiences and in the cultural context of the time in which I was raised. I have been told the stories of the ways in which my family came to Oklahoma, both in the history lessons and in the stories shared by my family, and I have always found the stark difference in the tone and nature of the stories to

be jarring. At home, I heard stories of the suffering and death, of the babies that died along the way on the Trail of Tears from the hunger, sickness, or the cold, and I heard of how my great grandmother remembered the stories of the cold and the hungry that her father, who was forcefully marched from South Carolina to Oklahoma as a young child, held onto into adulthood. However, at school, I was told a story that more closely matched the one that I will be discussing from the Semi-Centennial. A story where the Indians agreed to move West for the good of the country and for their own good, and how they were helped and led into civilization by the settlers.

I also understand that I cannot help but bring into this research process all of the knowledges about my home and the stories that I was told; however, I also have to take into consideration the environment in which the stories of the Semi-Centennial were told. This is not to make excuses or concessions for the damaging rhetoric that was perpetuated during different eras of this nation and the state's history, but instead to use them as a tool through which to better understand the ways that these kinds of behaviors are continuing in the state and in the nation today and continuing the tradition of settler-colonialism in the state that is already always happening.

As someone who grew up in a bicultural home in a bicultural community, and as someone who has been thinking about the events and what they mean to me and the ways I view my home through them, I have found that I see a lot of myself in the events, despite how uncomfortable that thought makes me. I came into this research not only to gather the stories, but to also better understand the ways that the stories told at the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial represent the power enacted through the control of a place or a people's stories. This duality of academic/community accountability and the understanding of the contextual cultural differences

that have occurred in the 50 years since the event, remind me of the role that I play, that my body and experiences play in my research was another concern I went into the archives with. I knew that my connection to both Oklahoma and to the Semi-Centennial itself and the internal struggle I have long had with my relationship with both would surely shape the ways in which I interpreted the data that I would find there. This is another way in which both Cultural Rhetorics and Indigenous research methodologies helped to inform how I could make sense of what I found in the archives.

My responsibility to the stories that I gathered and to the relationships that I share with both my home and academic community is something that is also very important to the ways in which I conducted this research and the resulting product. The notion of relationality is something that has been excellently articulated by Shawn Wilson. In *Research as Ceremony*, Wilson sets out an Indigenous research paradigm. In the text, Wilson uses a partial epistolary form to speak not only to scholars reading/using the text, but also to his children, explaining to them both the reasons for the text and the why of the academic language of the main text. He outlines axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology as essential components in his paradigm, and how relationality and accountability to communities is key to Indigenous researchers and the work that they perform. Wilsons's text helped me to articulate my own relationality and accountability in how I talk about the communities that I will discuss and the methodology I am suggesting.

This turn to story as a decolonial methodology is also discussed by Wilson, when he describes his research methodology as "...a way that is more culturally appropriate for Indigenous people by taking the role of storyteller rather than researcher/author" (32). In this

project and in my research spaces, I was gathering the stories that I wanted to share in this document more than I was truly *researching* the Semi-Centennial events.

What I did with the information that I gathered was also informed by those who have come before me. King, Gubele, and Anderson in Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics discuss the how of teaching indigenous rhetorics. How do we approach something like rhetoric, especially cultural rhetorics, that so often involve our stories and practices? Indigenous cultures are often commodified and appropriated, so sharing this knowledge is something that must be carefully considered. However, it is important for the efforts of decolonizing the academy to include at least part of this information as well. As King, Gubele, and Anderson describe, "The study of American Indian texts (alphabetic, visual, digital, performative, oral, and material) requires an understanding of the importance of sovereignty to American Indian nations as well as the diversity of cultures and subject positions that exist under the umbrella term American Indian" (7). According to the authors, when we teach indigenous rhetoric and pedagogy, we are practicing rhetorical sovereignty and survivance. We are reminding folks that we are here and have rights as sovereign nations. We are challenging the western notion of the discipline, establishing the value of story, and restoring indigenous voices on stolen lands (8). While King, Gubele, and Anderson were specifically discussing the ways in which we can present Indigenous methodologies in the classroom, I believe that the same level of care is needed in handling and presenting the stories that I gathered in the archives as well.

**Indigenous Theory and Story**

As a practice, stories are inherently relational and communal. Embedded in them are histories and traditions of the communities to which they belong. Story is a relational methodology that

allows us to draw and make clear the connectedness of our knowledges and knowledge making practices. Stories help to make clear the interconnectedness of people, places/spaces, and communities. As Absolon tells us, "Our own knowledges and methodologies are there and can be applied to the work we are doing in the academy" (47). The sharing and gathering of stories is one of those methodologies, and while the bulk of my data collection for this project was conducted in the archives, it was the gathering of stories that was more of my focus than the archives themselves, and the methodologies that I turned to for their analysis allowed for a more articulate sharing of these stories. In considering how to best preform my story gathering, Indigenous scholarly voices, in conversation with those in Cultural Rhetorics, Indigenous and non, to help me to articulate my understanding and usage of story and story gathering for this project.

In how I understand Cultural Rhetorics informed Indigenous methodologies, there is a great value placed on the value and role of stories in understanding relationships between peoples, the land, and the environments in which they come together. Considering and working to understand a story, a story about a place or a people, can facilitate the addition of the human element to any history. Stories give voice to history. Cultural Rhetorics tell us that the "practice of story is integral to doing cultural rhetorics" because it allows for connecting, for *constellating* how these things interact and create meaning together (Powell, et al. Act I). And, as Andrea Riley-Mukavetz tells us, "…story is theory" ("Towards a Cultural…" 110). Not only do stories frame the understandings of a people, they also show relationships with the world around them. This is a powerful piece of knowledge to give to someone. In conceptualizing and researching this project, the Indigenous knowledge making/research methodologies, especially those that

deal with the placement of self in your research methodology have guided me in both the gathering of data/stories and the analysis of those data/stories.

For example, Absolon's understanding and discussion of the value and usefulness of story and storytelling in research was also invaluable in my understanding of how to *gather* the stories in the archives and retell them for this project. She says, "Indigenous searchers talk about storytelling as a methodology to help our people tell stories so they can leave their mark. These stories help us to not get lost. We build on our stories and each other's stories, and eventually our stories weave together as we share them" (137). I went into these archives both to answer questions I had about the Semi-Centennial and to gather the stories told by the little pieces of ephemera that had been filed away about it.

Andrea Riley Mukavetz articulates the connection between Indigenous Studies and Cultural Rhetorics, saying, "Scholars of Native rhetorics dwell at the intersections of rhetoric and composition and American Indian studies" ("Females, the Strong Ones" 4). Notions of the value of story, and the role that the land plays in the stories are specific concepts that have been deeply informed by both Cultural Rhetorics and Indigenous Studies. The authors and texts in both Indigenous studies and Cultural Rhetorics that have been instrumental to this project in helping me to better articulate why an Oklahoma event 50 years ago that is scarcely discussed even in the state offers an opportunity to discuss identity and power in the larger Rhetorical field include

**Cultural Rhetorics in the Archives**

Just as the body that I inhabit influenced the ways in which I conducted my data gathering and the analysis of that data, I was also guided and informed by the voices and theories of the scholars who have shaped the ways I understand knowledge and knowledge making. The ways

in which I considered the actual archival materials while I was physically in the spaces was also influenced by my understanding of Cultural Rhetorics and what my story gathering was doing to embody these practices. The archival methodologies suggested in Cultural Rhetorics texts were also helpful in researching this project.

Alexis Ramsey's *Working in the Archives* was one of the guiding methodologies for the archival data collection done for this project from the beginning. As I initially went into these archives not knowing what I would find, these principles helped to guide the way I collected this initial data and to help me to understand how the practices of a Cultural Rhetorics archival methodology can be used to uncover the stories that the archives and their contents can tell. In her text, Ramsey offers an orientation to conducting archival cultural rhetorics work: *Principle of selectivity, Principle of cross-referencing, and Principle of categorization* (*Working in the Archives).*

Ramsey suggests that, in the archives, researchers must understand how they and the data collected are affected by the "*Principle of selectivity:* the researcher's understanding of how archivists select and omit artifacts for a given collection" (171). In the case of both the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Tulsa Historical Society archives, the materials I found were in near disarray. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason in how the materials were arranged. They were literally just shuffled into folders of loosely related materials. There seemed to be little "selectivity" beyond "put all the things about this event into folders, put the folders in a box, forget about boxes full of folders." Before going into the archives, I was worried about how the curated nature of the collections would affect the data I would be able to collect. Would the story that was created in the archives change the story I went into find? Instead, I found something uncurated, something left raw and largely unsorted. The state in which I found these

collections offered me a chance to see the materials without too much outside influence. Their near forgotten disarray allowed for an organic, if not sometimes frustrating, experience of searching for the stories. I was not offered a clear path to uncovering the data that I hoped to find. Instead, I was handed boxes of potential stories to piece together.

The state in which I found the documents also allowed for me to consider Ramsey's other principles in an unexpected way. The "*Principle of cross-referencing:* the practice of searching across documents for contextual traces that clarify an archival document's rhetorical situation or that confirm, corroborate, clarify, or contradict a fact or point cited in a given document" and the *"Principle of categorization:* the development of keywords and finding aids that help researchers access information in the archive" (172) In the boxes and files of things that I found at the archives in OKC and Tulsa, I had to follow along with the documents and how I was able to engage with them.

My Cultural Rhetorics mindset and orientation into the archives was also informed by the voices shared in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process.* In the introduction to the text, editor Gesa Kirsch discusses how, "...virtual, historical, and lived experiences intersect, particularly as researchers extract meaning from sources in locations most associated with isolation and loneliness— the archives (1). In the archival spaces I visited to gather my stories, I felt that sense of isolation, especially since I was the first to open so many of the boxes. I felt alone in my search for the stories that had been hidden for so long on those shelves. Kirsch goes on in the introduction to discuss how bringing family knowledges and histories into the archives affects the way knowledge found is valued, saying how this practice:

> ...teaches the value of attending how our family, social, and cultural history is intertwined with more traditional notions of history and culture. It helps us understand

> and explore the fissures of historical narratives, the places at the margins where voices have been suppressed, silenced, or ignored. (3)

With this in mind, the role that my own history is intertwined with that of my research and of Oklahoma itself, helped me to remember why I was in these lonely spaces and the role that I was playing in uncovering and gathering these stories so that they can be shared.

The consciously inclusive nature of the research practices outlined by Royster and Kirsch in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies,* were also useful to me in thinking of how to discuss the communities and peoples that this project deals with. They helped me to articulate non-Indigenous ways in which the western academic model has been damaging to marginalized communities and can be pushed against through a more humanistic research model, saying:

> …these processes have also established the primacy of Westernized traditions in our field and set in motion a tendency toward us-and-them expectations that are binary and hierarchical, based on the assumption that Western traditions are a superior manifestation of civilization and sophistication, above and beyond all of options or sometimes above and beyond even the likelihood of other options. (30)

This acknowledgment of the damage that a continuous structure that favors a white, male, Western outlook affects the ways in which alternate research models are challenged in the academy.

As a student of Cultural Rhetorics, the ways in which it values and assess multiple knowledges were important to my research methodologies. As discussed in Royster and Kirsch, the traditional ways of research are often very silencing. When considering my research through a Cultural Rhetorics methodological framework, I am foremost concerned with the ways in

which Cultural Rhetorics strongly emphasizes the inclusion of voices and methodological frameworks and ways of knowing from often marginalized or silenced communities. This inclusive nature is something that is seen in the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab when the authors stated, “Up to this point, the disciplinary culture of rhetoric has been built on the canonization of idealized Western (colonial) systems and worldviews (imperial). The story we're telling about cultural rhetorics invokes a different possibility for our disciplinary culture” (Act 1 Scene 1). Coming at my research, specifically my approach to this world as a story gathering rather than a purely archival project, is part of my efforts to contribute to those growing alternate possibilities in the discipline and Cultural research practices.

**Active Gathering: Actually Collecting the Stories**

My orientation and theoretical methodologies, however, were only a part of the research process for this dissertation project. The active gathering of the data, the stories, was a coming together of all of these things and an unexpected exploration of the history of my home. From the very beginning, I was unsure of what this research would look like. I had never done archival research before, and I could only imagine a world of white cotton gloves and quiet dusty rooms. I dreamt of speaking to archivists about the Semi-Centennial and receiving secret knowledges they had found in the stacks. However, this is not what I found, well, not exactly.

**Analysis: How I Did What I Did**

In my time in the archives, I scanned in dozens of documents, dozens of images, so then I had to decide how I was going to approach all of these materials. I did not want to depend on a method like coding to organize all of the data. Going through and making a numbered note about each time that Indigenous people were invoked or an image of indigeneity of some version or another popped up did not seem like a solution that matched my methodological goals for this project;

this just seemed like a continuation of the same Western, colonial methodologies that has caused so much pain and misinformation to and about Indigenous peoples and communities. However, I also knew that I couldn't talk about everything; I needed some kind of guidelines in order to determine what artifacts I would include in this document.

It was this need for something, anything to make the sheer volume manageable, that I settled on the thematic breakdown of the following chapters. Instead of every time I saw "Indian" things, including that data, I went looking for the places in which there were stories being told about Indigenous peoples and about Oklahoma itself. These stories came in the form of histories, in obviously staged photos, in advertisements, and in the story of the events themselves. I have used these images and stories to look at how the stories are being told and what that telling says about the way that history is being reconfigured, cleaned, and packaged for the Semi-Centennial audience.

This methodology, one rooted in story, led me to the analysis you see in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3, " And The Land We Belong to is Grand?: Oklahoma and Oklahoma History as Told by the Semi-Centennial," makes an analysis of the artifacts that I found and on the history of Oklahoma that I saw told at the events through the archival materials and the creation of *storied places,* and the ways in which these spaces perpetuate possibly damaging, and often highly edited or untrue narratives about places. Chapter 4, "Telling Indian Tall Tales: Native Identity as Seen Through the Semi-Centennial," looks at the stories told about the Indigenous peoples of Oklahoma through events, advertisements, and imagery and the power that can be enacted over a people by controlling their stories.

## Chapter 3: And The Land We Belong to is Grand?: Oklahoma and Oklahoma History as Told by the Semi-Centennial


*Figure 6 Collectable Milk Glass from the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Text reads: Golden Jubilee Tulsarama Oklahoma's 50th Anniversary. Featuring the Tulsarama logo of an oil derrick surrounded with outlines of teepees and the Tulsa skyline and a refinery. To the left of the logo is an Indian and a cowboy to the right. Below the logo is an image of teepees, stretching into the distance. Personal Collection*

*The places and spaces in Oklahoma that I have inhabited in my life have greatly shaped who I am as a person. Sitting in my room a thousand miles away from the land that raised me, writing this paragraph, I can look at those places with a somewhat different eye. Since beginning*

*this project, I have thought a lot about why the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial and its ephemera have fascinated me since the moment I found out it was even a thing. I struggle with the way I feel about the events, even now as I work through this project, dozens of hours into spending much of my time thinking about the Semi-Centennial in some way or another.*

*The object from my personal collection that I have chosen to share for this chapter is from Tulsarama, the Semi-Centennial event that originally took place in the same building in which I found the trinket dish that was the impetus for this whole project. I liked to think about the elegant interconnectedness of the Semi-Centennial, my life in Oklahoma, and the places like the Tulsa Expo Center that I have visited over my life and how they all came together to share the very secrets and stories that I went searching for when I went into the archives.*

*The glass pictured above and beside is something that I interact with almost every day. I keep my make-up brushes in it, and it honestly isn't something that I even notice as I move through my day, even though I touch it frequently. I think that the glass and my relationship with it makes for an effective segue into this chapter about Oklahoma, the Land, and its history. The history of my home was and is always there, at least some version of it, but it isn't something that I think or thought about every day in coming to this project. In many ways, like the glass, the knowledges I have about Oklahoma are something present in my life, and my relationship to*

*Oklahoma is something that continues to affect the ways in which I move through this world (even if it is just where I reach for a blender brush.)*


*Figure 7 Collectable Milk Glass from the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text on logo reads: Oklahoma's 50th Anniversary Celebration 1907-1957 teepees to towers Semi-Centennial Apr. 22- Nov. 16 featuring illustrations of an oil derrick in the foreground with Tulsa and refineries in the background. Personal Collection*

*The glass itself, purchased at an estate sale in Tulsa, also shows the dualistic nature of the stylized version of Oklahoma that was seen at the Statehood Semi-Centennial events. On one side, it shows rows of teepees stretching off into the distance and the Tulsarama logo featuring more teepees shown opposite the Tulsa skyline. On the other side of the glass, the teepees are gone and have been replaced with a looming oil derrick in the foreground with refineries and skyscrapers in the background. This is the history of Oklahoma playing out on glass. The*

*Indigenous has been replaced by industry, industry driven by oil that built Tulsa, and the same oil companies that played a huge role in the 1957 Semi-Centennial events.*

**The Story of Oklahoma: Cowboys and Indians**

I am drawn to the story of Oklahoma that was told at the Semi-Centennial and in the ephemera and artifacts it left behind. One of the goals of this entire project was to gain a better understanding of how the story presented at the Semi-Centennial events is an important part of showing the nature and impact of the relationship between Oklahoma and the native folks who live there, even today. The ways in which the relationship between the Semi-Centennial and the actual state of Oklahoma are represented at the events and the artifacts left in the archives in Tulsa and Oklahoma City is important. This relationship showcases how the version of the history of Oklahoma that was told at the Semi-Centennial events is representative of the kinds of power enacted when a narrative is controlled, and in the case of the Semi-Centennial, seemingly forgotten or hidden away in dusty boxes. When I first began to consider an analysis of this event as a subject for my dissertation research, I was hesitant to propose it as there just wasn't much about the event available to me. All I knew about the Semi-Centennial events were the stories that were left behind in both the ephemera that led me to this project and in the snippets of information that had made it through the test of time as I gathered and researched my own collection. However, it is the stories told at the events about the state and the land that first caught my eye and my interest, and they are specifically especially important to this project.

In the previous chapter, "Gathering Stories: Cultural Rhetorics Informed Archival Collecting," I identified the methodological practices and voices that guided this project, and with this first data chapter, "And The Land We Belong to is Grand?: Oklahoma and Oklahoma History as Told by the Semi-Centennial," I will now show the fruits of my methodological turn

to story and story gathering with a discussion of the sanitized version of Oklahoma's history that was revealed in the artifacts that I collected in the Tulsa and Oklahoma City Historical Society archives. This chapter explores the story of Oklahoma that was curated and told by the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial events, narrowing in on the story of the actual land and resources of Oklahoma and the stories of how the state came to be. Further, I discuss images and text that illustrate how the oil companies who sponsored the events used the ephemera and the activities at the Semi-Centennial to show the alleged benefits and progress driven by the oil industry. I interweave these discussions with the stories of Oklahoma that I have seen and have been told throughout my life that have not only shaped the ways in which I view and think about my home, but also the ways in which those stories have shaped how I view and think about myself in relation to the land that raised me.

Additionally, this data chapter will introduce and define one of the primary goals of this project: how spaces and places like the Semi-Centennial events create *storied places,* locations that are rhetorically created to tell a very curated version of a story, like the history of a place, specifically intended to be consumed for entertainment purposes and often to overwrite the more sordid realities of the story. The concept of a *storied place* and the rhetorical value of an analysis of them, is an idea that has been brewing in my mind for a long time. I am always drawn to "historical sites" or "informative sites" and the stories that are told about them. The Oklahoma Semi-Centennial events and the analysis of the ways in which the creators of the event shaped Oklahoma history to suit their version of the story that is discussed in this chapter and the following is an excellent example of the kinds of power that can be enacted by creating a *storied place.*

**The Land and the Stories Told and Shared**

The Oklahoma that I want to talk about is a many-sided creature. It is my home and a weird and wonderful place that I love deeply and struggle with more and more the further from it my life drifts. The story of Oklahoma is one of the Wild West, of the frontier, of cowboys and Indians. Like David Chang in *The Color of the Land* tells us, "The history of Oklahoma is a history of movement, possession, and dispossession. It is American history told in fast-forward. It captures the dynamics of global history in the middle of a continent" (2). I think a lot about those Oklahoma stor(y/ies) that I was told growing up and those that I found in the archives in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. When it comes to Oklahoma, there has been (and still is, in many cases) a tendency for the stories to be sanitized and commodified to further the cowboys and Indians mythos of the state with little to no regard to the often-violent truth about the history of Oklahoma. As discussed in the previous chapter, "Gathering Stories: Cultural Rhetorics Informed Archival Collecting," with this project, I strove to look for the stories that are often forgotten or erased in the Western paradigm, the stories of a land with a contentious history.

The land itself has a lot of stories to tell. It is more than just a place, it is a character in its own story and in the stories of the people that live on and engage with it. In "From Place to Territories and Back Again: Centering Storied Land in the discussion of Indigenous Nation-building" author Mishuana Goeman recognizes the ways in which the land brings together community and community understanding, saying, "'Land' is a salient term and concept that can weave people together around common understandings and experiences" (23). In stories that I analyze, the land can act as its own actor, and it exists as more than just a location on a map. An example of how land can be more than just location is discussed in "Environmental Rhetoric and Ecologies of Place," when Peter Goggin outlines Massey's definition of space, saying:

> Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments and networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for a moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or region or even a continent. (Massey qtd in Goggin 1).

This notion of the interaction of places as moments that create understanding is at the core of this research. The narrative of the land that is created in order to tell a very specific story of history is key to my suggestion of the creation of rhetorical storied places. As mentioned in the Massey quote above, the scale of a place and the constellation of networks and relationships that are created in a place goes far beyond the confines of the actual physical boundaries. In the case of the Semi-Centennial, the narrator for the land was the creators of the event, who in telling the story of Oklahoma for the events, created a story about the land as well. These creators had a vested interest in the natural resources and commodification that the land offered, and the stories these narrators told frame the history as one of frontierism and conquest. It is the story of progress at the cost of lives and of the land and the damages inflicted on it by the extraction of these natural resources.

I am thinking of the ways in which the history of Oklahoma told at the events both invokes the land as a living thing and as a theater in which the cowboy and Indian stories took place. Tuck, Mackenzie & McCoy, in "Land Education: Indigenous, Post-colonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives on Place and Environmental Education Research," describe the land as a custodian of history, as well as the interrelated importance of the land to peoples and communities, saying, "...land can be considered as a teacher and conduit of memory" (9). Further, they describe how "'[l]and' is imbued with these long relationships and…the

pedagogies and knowledges that have emerged from those relationships (8). My understanding of the land of Oklahoma, informed by my life in/on the land itself, reflects the kind of relationships to which Tuck, Mackenzie, and McCoy refer. The memory is imbedded in me just as it is in the land. As such, the land is an active meaning-maker. As Gabriela Raquel Rìos describes in "Cultivating Land-Based Literacies and Rhetorics," literacies and knowledges are gained from the land. "As such, land-based literacies are literal acts of interpretation and communication that grow out of active participation with land" (62). The stories left behind about Oklahoma and the ways in which Oklahoma and its history are a part of interpreting those stories.

The memory that is carried by the land can be in physical things like the scars that have been left across the face of Oklahoma by the processes for extracting oil or in the stories carried by the people. In *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country,* Louis Erdrich discusses the ways in which the land acts as a keeper of stories when she said, "You could think of the lakes as libraries" (5). In this, she means that the history of the land is written across and within it. The land is a conduit of memory that actively carries and makes meaning, meanwhile we make meaning on/with/through the land, and yet the stories told about the land, depending on the intentions of the teller, may only contain traces of the complexities of these stories.

Just as I am aware of how I am an active influential force on the data that I collected, I am also aware that I am only one person who went into these spaces, trying to tell the story of many, many people, people I cannot talk to, people whose side of the story I was largely unable to find. Talking about the land as a rhetorical actor in the story of the Semi-Centennial and the stories the events themselves told gives me a position from which to talk about these things. The histories of Oklahoma are something that I have been exposed to my entire life, and the ones that

I found in the materials tell much those same stories I was told in history classes and school plays, generations later, but contrast starkly with those that I was told at home about how my family came to live in the state.

By turning my focus to the land, to Oklahoma, and how the land functions in these stories, I am able to see the ways in which there is a contrast in my own understanding of Oklahoma and the ways it is portrayed in the Semi-Centennial events. As an Oklahoman, I am aware that I have a relationship to my home that affects the way I understand any Oklahoma story; Lisa Brooks in *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* defines the relationship between land, the relationship to the land, and how it impacts the ways in which understanding is made saying, "What I am talking about here is not an abstraction, a theorizing about a conceptual category called "land" or "nature," but a physical, actual, material relationship to 'an ecosystem present in a definable place' that has been cultivated throughout my short life, and for much longer by those relations who came before me which, for better or worse, deeply informs my work" (xxiv). Similarly, I am influenced and impacted by the ways in which I have come to know my home state and the ways in which I am able to constellate the relationships between the land and the stories that the Semi-Centennial events left behind.

The story of the history of Oklahoma is something that has been deeply ingrained in me since I was first school aged. My classmates and I did Land Run reenactments at my primarily Indigenous elementary school, in which Native children dressed up as pioneers or Indians in paper bag vests, we watched Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* in class and sang songs from it in choir. The state has in many ways fully embraced a very specific narrative about how it came to be. Malea Powell, in "Blood and Scholarship: One Mixed-Blood's Story," discusses

the nature of the American narrative, one that is particularly significant when applied to Oklahoma, saying,

> A central component of this 'American tale' is the settlers' vision of the frontier, a frontier that is 'wilderness,' empty of all 'civilized' life. The settler is a brave individual who sets forth to pit *his* and I use the male pronoun here deliberately) skills of 'civilization' against this vast wilderness; *he* tames the wilderness, domesticates it, and installs in it the icons of civilization…. (*Race, Rhetoric, and Composition 3)*

Yet, in spite of my Land Run elementary school reenactment, and the fetishization of the settler's vision of this land, to accurately represent the history of Oklahoma, one cannot ignore that Indigenous people are a significant part of the story. In *An Indigenous People's History of the United States,* Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz says:

> Writing US history from an indigenous peoples' perspective requires rethinking the consensual national narrative. That narrative is wrong or deficient, not in its facts, dates, or details but rather in its essence. Inherent in the myth we've been taught is an embrace of settler colonialism and genocide. The myth persists, not for lack of free speech or poverty of information but rather for an absence of motivation to ask questions that challenge the core of the scripted narratives of the origin story. ("Intro")

When I think about Oklahoma, I think of the stories that I have been told during my life there. Now that I am no longer in the state, I can look at those stories with a somewhat different eye.

"There's a story I know" (1). With this opening Line, Thomas King captures one of the most important themes in his book, *The Truth About Stories,* and in this dissertation project: how the stories someone knows have a significant impact on how one sees and understands the world. King's book is an important part of my understanding of the ways in which we are and are

shaped by the stories that we tell and the stories we have been told. “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (2). Through the lens of King, I can see the impact of the stories that have been told about Oklahoma, stories that put all their focus on the pioneers as the builders of the land and the native people as something of the past, something gone, and a people in need of a favor or a handout from the white settlers. Perhaps it goes without saying, but this narrative is deeply damaging and washes away the harsh realities of this histories.

Thinking of the narrative told in the ephemeral artifacts of the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial events as stories helps to put the humanity back, and to make clearer how powerful the histories told can be. Lee Maracle in *Oratory: Coming to Theory* tells us, “Among European scholars there is an alienated notion which maintains that theory is separate from story, and thus a different set of words are required to "prove" an idea than to "show" one. Yet if you take the story out of any school textbook the student is left without proof for the positing of any information” (3). The stories about the land of Oklahoma that the event tells, and the ways in which that story continues in the archives, are useful in exploring the rhetorical practices of invocation that are ongoing in the state, more than 50 years later.

**“And the land we belong to is Grand”: Oklahoma at the Semi-Centennial**

To begin my analysis of the artifacts that I encountered in the archives, I want first focus on the story of Oklahoma that was told at the Semi-Centennial events and in their ephemera. In my introductory chapter, I introduced the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial of 1957, an event seemingly nearly forgotten, that near perfectly encapsulates the larger understanding of how Oklahoma history has been shaped and scrubbed in the years since statehood.

In *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States,* transplanted Okie scholar Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz discusses how the narrative of America that is most often told literally

whitewashes the theft, violence, and genocide that that this country was built on. She describes, "Those who seek history with an upbeat ending, a history of redemption and reconciliation, may look around and observe that such a conclusion is not visible, not even in utopian dreams of a better society" (2). The 1957 centennial envisions this kind of utopian dream to which Dunbar-Ortiz refers.

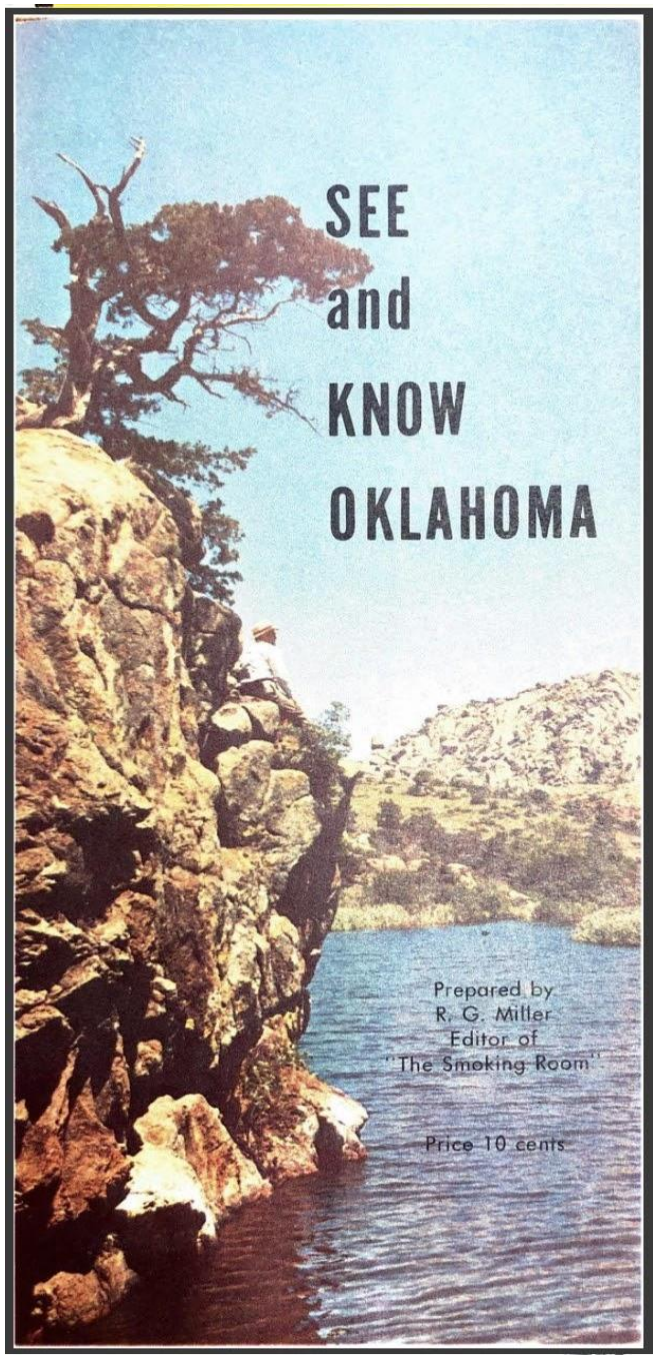
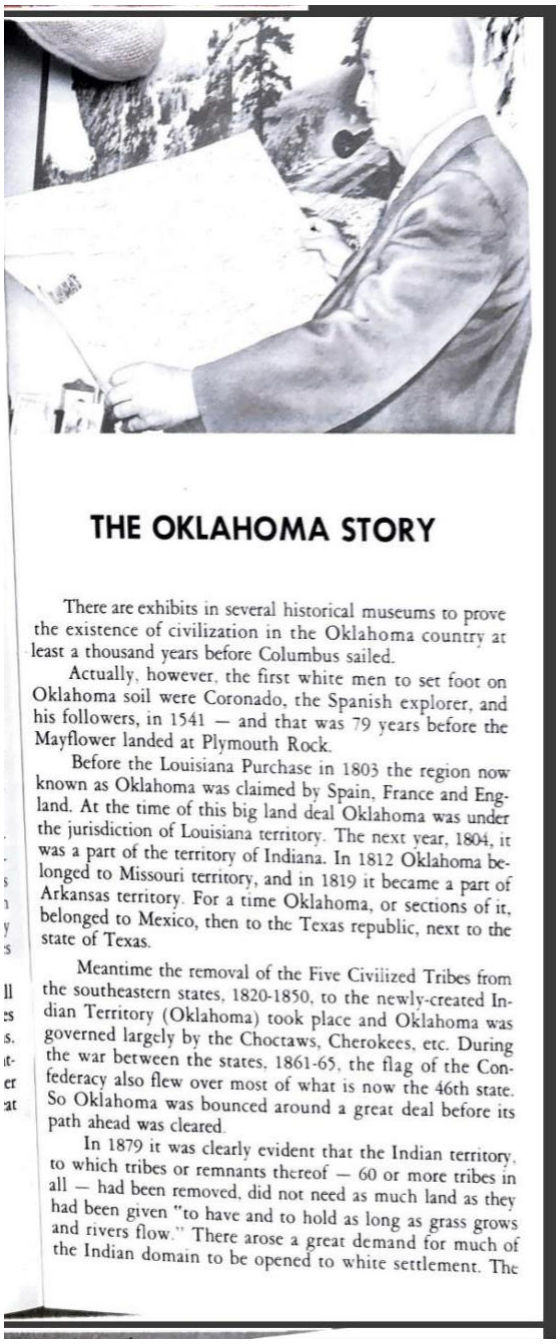



*Figure 8 Cover of the See and Know Oklahoma Brochure from the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: See and Know Oklahoma. Prepared by R.G. Miller Editor of "The Smoking Room" Price 10 cents featuring a photograph of a bluff over water with a person sitting, looking into the distance. 21 Jan 2019 Tulsa Historical Society Archives, Tulsa, OK*



## THE OKLAHOMA STORY

There are exhibits in several historical museums to prove the existence of civilization in the Oklahoma country at least a thousand years before Columbus sailed.

Actually, however, the first white men to set foot on Oklahoma soil were Coronado, the Spanish explorer, and his followers, in 1541 — and that was 79 years before the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock.

Before the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 the region now known as Oklahoma was claimed by Spain, France and England. At the time of this big land deal Oklahoma was under the jurisdiction of Louisiana territory. The next year, 1804, it was a part of the territory of Indiana. In 1812 Oklahoma belonged to Missouri territory, and in 1819 it became a part of Arkansas territory. For a time Oklahoma, or sections of it, belonged to Mexico, then to the Texas republic, next to the state of Texas.

Meantime the removal of the Five Civilized Tribes from the southeastern states, 1820-1850, to the newly-created Indian Territory (Oklahoma) took place and Oklahoma was governed largely by the Choctaws, Cherokees, etc. During the war between the states, 1861-65, the flag of the Confederacy also flew over most of what is now the 46th state. So Oklahoma was bounced around a great deal before its path ahead was cleared.

In 1879 it was clearly evident that the Indian territory, to which tribes or remnants thereof — 60 or more tribes in all — had been removed, did not need as much land as they had been given "to have and to hold as long as grass grows and rivers flow." There arose a great demand for much of the Indian domain to be opened to white settlement. The

*Figure 9 Inside page of the See and Know Oklahoma Brochure for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Title text reads: The Oklahoma Story and goes on to tell a version of the history of Oklahoma (discussed in the main text) featuring a photograph of a man. 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK*

However, finding the truth of these stories, or any American story about the history and impact of Indigenous peoples in a way that is more complete is not so easily done, as can be seen in the materials for the events. Dunbar-Ortiz continues “The history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism— the founding of a state based on the ideology of white

supremacy, the widespread practice of African Slavery, and a policy of genocide and land theft" (2). While Dunbar-Ortiz was referring to the United States as a whole, these are the same practices that went into the specific formation of Oklahoma, both as Indian Territory and after it was stolen once again for statehood.

One of the most significant examples (offenders) from the artifacts that I collected to discuss the history of Oklahoma told at the events is a pamphlet seen in the previous two images, made for visitors that advertises it offers a chance for readers to "See and Know Oklahoma." For a mere 10 cents, readers would be able to know Oklahoma, at least through the vision of the event provided. In the pamphlet, the author shares a history of Oklahoma, a section of questions and answers, and information about the tourist destinations in the state. It is the ways in which the history of Oklahoma is told, and the Indigenous residents are represented, that I find of particular interest. In the next chapter, I will specifically discuss the ways in which Indigenous identity is invoked, but this artifact features a history of the state that clearly shows that progress of the state as something antithetical to Indigeneity. Inside the pamphlet, a very specific story is being told about the history of the state. One where the Indians … "did not need as much land as they had been *given* [emphasis mine]". This asserts that the Native folks had not only been "given" the land, as opposed to being forcefully and violently marched there, but also that the land that was divided among the 60 plus tribes was too much for the Indians to manage. This is a perfect example of the ways in which the history of the state was cleaned up for visitors to the event. This story suggests that the death marches and forceful removals of countless Indigenous peoples from their homes and ways of life and their plunking down in Oklahoma was actually a gift to the Natives who were moved there. While I will specifically discuss the ways in which native peoples were invoked for the event in the following chapter, with this first ephemera

example we can see a lie of the land that was being told; that Oklahoma was empty before the colonial settlers came to the land, that somehow Oklahoma existed only through this context.

The land of Oklahoma, in this example, is seen as nothing more than a commodity. Take for example the description of "the clamor for the Indian land to be opened to settlement," as well as the discussion of the land run events that supposedly "populated the state." Again, we see the way the lands were treated. Once again, they were the site for removal and a place where the Indigenous people were *permitted to retain their identities and to run their own governments.* However, even according to this document, this did not last, and suddenly all of Oklahoma was "united," and the "Whites and Indians then were all placed under the same rule and banner of statehood and have lived happily and progressively together ever since." This assertion that the White Settlers and the Indigenous peoples living together on the land of Oklahoma does not last long. In the version of Oklahoma's history told in the pamphlet, it immediately shifts its focus to the industries of Oklahoma and the parks that were created and carved from the land for recreation and profit. The pamphlet wraps up its discussion of the history of Oklahoma by saying:

> *Oklahoma has become alive, modern, progressive. It is proud of its first half-century of statehood. It looks forward confidently to the oncoming decades. Old ways and ideals have been replaced by the new. The old stagecoaches, sod houses, covered wagons, wild buffalo herds, buckboards, shack towns, six-gun laws, outlaw hideouts, tomahawk-toting Indians— all of these are gone, living only in the memory of a few surviving frontiersmen.* ("Oklahoma Story")

This history of the state and the ways in which it has "progressed," invokes the state as a living being, proud of how the old ways and ideals have been lost. This living version of the land is not

concerned with the damage that the industry has caused, nor that its story is being told by the very folks who are doing the harm.

**Industry and Oklahoma: Oil drives it All**

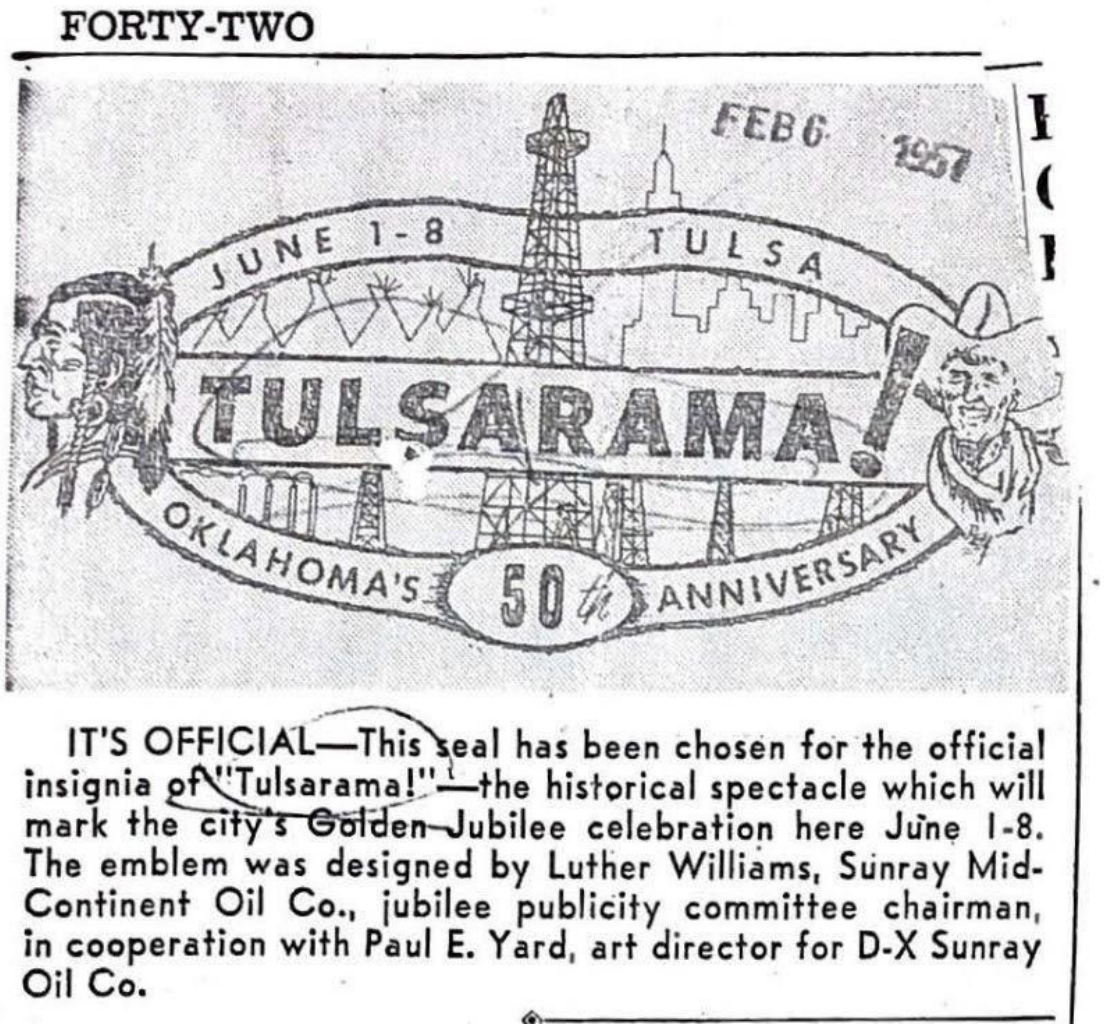



*Figure 10 Newspaper Clipping from the Feb 6, 1957 Daily Oklahoman. Text reads: June 1-8 Tulsa Tulsarama! Oklahoma's 50th Anniversary. IT'S OFFICIAL--- This seal has been chosen for the official insignia of "Tulsarama!" ---the historical spectacle which will mark the city's Golden Jubilee celebration here June 1-8. The emblem was designed by Luther Williams, Sunray Mid Continent Oil Co., jubilee publicity committee chairman, in cooperation with Paul E. Yard, art director for D-X Sunray Oil Co. 21 Jan 2019 Tulsa Historical Society Archives, Tulsa, OK.*

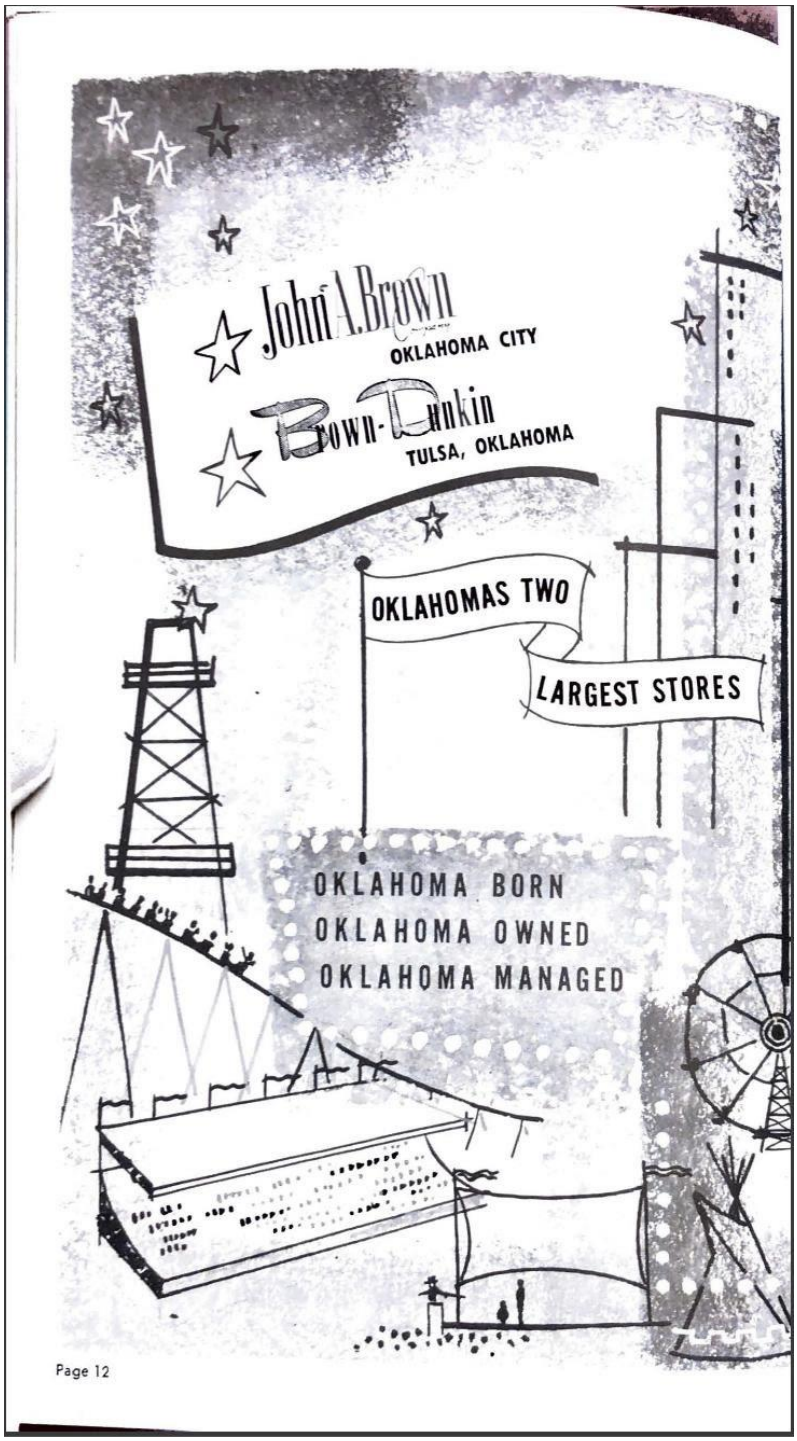



*Figure 11 Inside advertisement from the Semi-Centennial Souvenir Brochure for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: John A. Brown Oklahoma City Brown-Dunkin Tulsa, OK Oklahoma's two largest stores. Oklahoma Born. Oklahoma Owned. Oklahoma Managed, featuring stylized illustrations of a city skyline and an oil derrick in the background with the fairgrounds and a small teepee in the foreground. 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK.*

The role that the natural resources industry, especially oil, played in the Semi-Centennial is omnipresent. As I made my way through the folders and piles of unsorted ephemera in the archives, I, unsurprisingly, noticed a great deal of mention to the oil industry of Oklahoma. This is not surprising because I have grown up knowing that it is largely oil that keeps the lights in the state, so to speak. However, in terms of the kinds of imagery of the state that I saw through the documents and other goods, the oil derrick was a repeated image. As can be seen in the TULSARAMA! logo announcement above, the oil industry is featured front and center, with both derricks and a refinery displayed along with the stylized teepees and Tulsa skyline. The copy for the image reads that it was designed by a committee chairman and an art director for two different oil companies, and the oil related images dominate the logo. While Tulsa was known as the "Oil capital of the world," at least locally, I am further drawn to this juxtaposition of the oil with the native imagery.

The direct comparison of the native roots of the state to that of the oil industry is something that I saw in several other places throughout my research. The souvenir program also above is an example of the ways the two were juxtaposed against one another. In this example (taken from the same program discussed in the introduction), we see the Oklahoma City skyline and fairgrounds looming over the teepees tucked away in the corner. Like in the "historical" example of history given earlier, the industry is pushing the Indigenous further and further into a corner and illustrating that the land is something to be owned and commodified by settler logics.


*Figure 12 Image of the Industries of Oklahoma from the Special Edition of Oklahoma Today for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: Oklahoma Semi-Centennial 1907-1957 featuring illustrations of tourist draws and industrial locations placed on a map of Oklahoma. 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK.*

This tension between commodified land and indigenous histories is also seen in this map of Oklahoma, included in a program guide for the event, with the industries of the area marked pictographically on it. Scattered among the wheat, oil, and cotton, vestiges of the Indigenous are still seen. However, they are featured alongside the same stagecoaches and covered wagons that were said to be forgotten in the other examples above. This is the inconsistency of these stories. This is where it is obvious that the history of Oklahoma being told in these spaces is one that is being created to tell a Hollywood version of the state's history, and the Indigenous portions of it are used as only window dressing.

**BoomTown: Fun for the Whole Family?**


*Figure 13 Arial Photograph of Boomtown, USA at the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial featuring a mock village, cemetery, and oil drilling set-up. Text reads: Oklahoma Historical Society. JoAnne and Lee Reeder Collection Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection Oklahoma City, OK*

Engagement with this history of Oklahoma and the ways that the land has been commodified were perhaps best captured in the form of "Boomtown, USA."

One of the premier attractions of the primary Oklahoma City event was that of Boomtown, U.S.A. As can be seen in the aerial photo above from the Oklahoma City Historical Society archives, this fabricated oil boom town was built on the midway of the Oklahoma City Fairgrounds, where the main events took place, and offered visitors and opportunity to feel like they are a part of the industry the drove Oklahoma at the time and today. The small town featured store fronts and oil derricks, along with a mock cemetery and the chance for visitors to "drill for oil" or see the "house that oil built," as

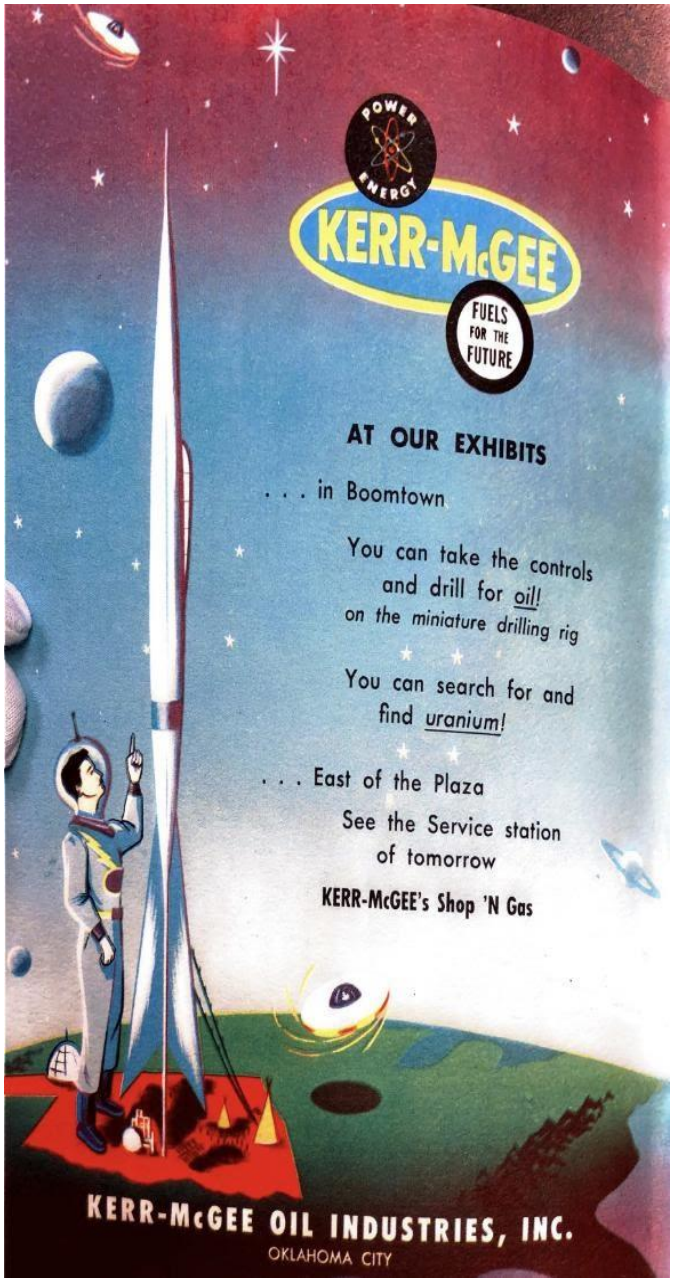



*Figure 14 Advertisement from the Souvenir Brochure for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: At our exhibits in Boomtown you can take the controls and drill for oil! on the miniature drilling rig. You can search for and find uranium! East of the plaza see the service station of tomorrow Kerr-McGee's Shop 'n' Gas. Kerr-McGee Oil Industries, INC. Oklahoma City featuring a retrofuturistic image of a man in a spacesuit pointing up at a silver rocket. At his feet are tiny teepees and cities. 11 Jan. 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK*

can be seen in the Semi-Centennial fact book pictured in the introduction. The location even showed off the latest in drilling equipment for the guests to interact with, saying: *The nation's major oil producers, refiners and marketers are joining in building this colorful village. Actual*

*drilling rigs, from the earliest crude wooden structures to the newest portable rigs will be in operation ("Fact Book").*

Images for Boomtown, USA, like the one to the above, use images of the atomic age in which the events took place to show the ways in which the oil company, in this example Kerr-McGee, and the technologies they bring progress Oklahoma into the future. As mentioned above and seen on this ad, guests to the event were able to control a miniature oil rig, but more interesting to me, is that they were also given a chance to look for uranium, something that was very minimally mined for in Oklahoma during the 1950s. A 1955 *Time* magazine article, titled


*Figure 15 Photograph of Spectators at Boomtown, USA featuring a group of men and women looking out of frame with an oil derrick and American flags in the background Text reads: Oklahoma Historical Society JoAnne and Lee Reeder Collection Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.*

"Mining: Oklahoma Uranium," says, "Uranium fever struck Oklahoma last week, carried there by a Texas wildcatter named Samuel Labon Shepherd" (*Time Magazine).* It goes on to discuss

how it was a very minimal find in the state. The inclusion of this extraction/mining process in Boomtown seems to be a further way to show Oklahoma, a distinctly oil state, as also making its progressive move into the atomic age. This juxtaposition of atomic and oil is also seen in street level images from the event. In the Tulsa Historical Society photo above, spectators are shown gazing out into the mock oil fields, loomed over by both an oil derrick and the atomic arrow structure erected for the event. The image of the stagecoach just behind them continues the somewhat murky historical narrative that was taking place at the events.

**Storied Places: Curating a Space and a History**

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which the history of Oklahoma as a place and a space was represented through materials from Semi-Centennial events. The land played a crucial role in these stories and was used by the founders of the event to enact power and control the narrative history of the state. I suggest that even though my specific analysis here is about an event in Oklahoma over 50 years ago, it provides a very concrete example of the value of stories (Powell, King, etc) and the stories that a place can tell. I suggest that the Semi-Centennial events, and other curated events of the same sort, are *storied places.*

The notion of a *storied place* is born out of the ways in which specific locations, both permanent and ephemeral, are specifically curated and created in order to tell a specific story. In the case of the Semi-Centennial, this *storied place* represents a trend in the ways in which the history of the state is framed to show the benefits of the expansion and settlement. Further, the ways in which oil extraction is viewed as a positive influential force in the state. The *storied place* created at the Semi-Centennial events and their representation and invocation of the Indigenous peoples of Oklahoma can be used to analyze the ways in which peoples and places are ongoingly commodified capitalistic purposes. And in the creation of a *storied place,* I mean

that the events themselves, the spaces in which they happened, and the narrative created and fostered about and at the events were all curated in order to tell a very specific story about Oklahoma in that moment. The story that they tell is one of industry and progress, progress that is specifically invoked to be a progression away from the "primitive" of indigeneity and toward things like oil and aircrafts.

When creating slogans, images, and activities for the 1957 event, the minds and people behind the Semi-centennial storied Oklahoma's history, the story of the "progress" Oklahoma had made in the 50 years since statehood. Kristin Arola in "Composing as Culturing: An American Indian Approach to Digital Ethics," tells us that "In all acts of production… there is acknowledgement that you produce more life, opening up new possibilities and potentials for further acts of production and analysis" (280). The acts of creation that occurred at the Semi-Centennial events went further than just the stories it told about Oklahoma and its history; the created stories and the kind of narrative history created about the land have washed over the ways in which it has been populated through theft and violence (Land Runs/removals) and damaged through the extraction of natural resources and removed the need for any guilt about these acts for visitors to the Semi-Centennial events.

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which the history of Oklahoma was retold and packaged in a way that best framed the narrative of progress and expansion that the Semi-Centennial events worked to feature. This reimagining and mixing of the state's history enacted a power of control over the harsh reality of the cost of this growth and change. Further, I have discussed the ways in which this kind of specific narrative and historical framework creates the idea of a *storied place* in which this narrative can best be featured, in this case, the actual events of the Semi-Centennial.

In the next chapter, “Telling Indian Tall Tales: Native Identity as Seen Through the Semi-Centennial,” I turn to the stories of the Indigenous peoples that inhabited Oklahoma as represented in the found archival materials. I discuss the ways that I found specific Indigenous identity was curated at the events and can clearly be seen in the ephemera, especially in the images and advertisements from the events, as well as the power that is wielded when a people’s story and identity is given the same treatment as that of the land and history.

## Chapter 4: Telling Indian Tall Tales: Native Identity as Seen Through the Semi-Centennial


*Figure 16 Large tin decorative plate from the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: Oklahoma 50th Anniversary Celebration 1907-1957 Teepees to Towers Semi-Centennial Apr. 22- Nov. 6 featuring the shield logo for the events with a crossed laurel and pipe with oil derricks, teepees, cattle, city skylines, and a factory. Personal Collection*

*My relationship with the Semi-centennial in many ways reminds me of my own struggles with my place as a mixed-blood Indigenous Oklahoman. Before I moved away from Oklahoma and my Cherokee community, the fact I was Cherokee was not something that I ever thought about as being something that needed further thought. It was just a fact, like my green eyes. I was so close to the forest of my own Indigenous identity that I couldn't see the trees. After moving to Michigan, suddenly people were interested in talking to me about Cherokee things and about the way of life that had always just* been *for me.*

*I sometimes find myself only halfway joking about how I am the world's worst Indian. I do not speak my heritage language, I don't sing, I don't dance, and I only go to powwows to eat the food. I have been told countless times that I am not what people expected when they met a "real" Cherokee. It is this expectation of what an Indian should and should not be that is at the heart of this chapter. The ways in which Indigenous identity was crafted at the Semi-Centennial events brings into clear focus one version of what "Indian" looks like, and not always (or often) in a way that is representative of what contemporary Indigeneity looks like, even in the 1950s.*

*The item from my personal collection that I chose to share for this chapter and story is not one that is specifically related. Instead it just one of the pieces that I see every day. This plate usually hangs on my wall, and at 18in across, it is a prominent part of the décor on the wall it occupies. This is just one of the ways the Semi-Centennial has and continues to be a visible part of my life. The plate is a conversation piece, and it often has given me a chance to talk about the event with which I am arguably obsessed.*

**Indian Tall Tales: Stories of Identity and Power in Oklahoma**

> *"This story comes, as all stories do, from a much larger, more complicated accumulation of stories" (Powell 115).*

Just as with the land, the rhetorical creation of Indigenous identity is an important part of understanding the ways in which Indigenous peoples are viewed by the creator of that image. Like with the created history of Oklahoma discussed in the previous chapter, by creating an idealized (or simplified or white-washed) version of Indians (or any people or place), the narrative and the history, can be controlled. There is seemingly no need to further investigate the reality of an image or of a history if the created version is so deeply saturated in a public's conscious that it just *feels* correct.

This chapter builds from my discussion of the story of the land that was told at the statehood events to the story of the people who inhabit and interact with that land. I look specifically at the ways in which the identity of Indigenous peoples of Oklahoma were invoked for the Semi-Centennial events, and how these people were used as window dressing for the events, furthering a notion of settler-colonialism and the power of control. I continue my investigation into the stories told by the archival materials for the celebrations as rhetorical artifacts. Specifically, I look at the ways in which the colonial, rhetorically curated stories create meaning about the people. Exploring this creation of meaning offers a way to view the impact that specific invocations of people and places create have and gives us a space for a rhetorical analysis of the ways in which these people and places are viewed both by outsiders and by themselves. I conduct this analysis of identity through the stories and images found in the archives. As discussed in Chapter Two "Gathering Stories: Cultural Rhetorics Informed Archival Collecting," my analysis is informed and shaped by Cultural Rhetorics practices that allow the stories of the Semi-Centennial to become the object of analysis. Constellating Cultural Rhetorics with Indigenous Studies' discussions of Indigeneity allows me to constellate the implications of creation as woven between both disciplines. Therefore, this is not just an archival historiography, but instead, it is also a collection of stories about power and relationships.

To begin with, many voices in Indigenous studies have discussed the practice and impact of the rhetorical creation of "Indianness" that has taken place in both popular culture and in the academy. These discussions have been instrumental in my understanding of Indigeneity as seen at the events. When considering the ways in which images of the "Indian" that are specifically constructed to portray a very particular kind of Indigeneity, there have been many authors that have discussed the how and possible whys of this practice. In Manifest Manners, Gerald Vizenor

discusses how the created version of Indigenous people is something that has existed and persisted alongside popular media for some time now. He outlines how this version of "Indianness" is a simulation, saying, "Simulations are the absence of the tribes: that absence was wiser in the scenes of silence, richer in costumes, and more courageous on a ride beside simulated animals" (6).


*Figure 17 Image of Two men shaking hands and wearing Plains-Style War Bonnets. The man in the foreground is shirtless and holding a stone hammer. The man in the background wears a suit. JoAnne and Lee Reeder Collection Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection Oklahoma City, OK*

The created Indians that Vizenor discusses (and were seen in ephemera from the Semi-Centennial) are an idealized version of the peoples, a brighter more *Indianier* version. He continues, "The Indian was an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation: the word has no referent in tribal languages or cultures" (*Manifest Manners* 11). Images like the one above are found throughout the ephemera for the event. The images show the simulated, homogenous image of Natives I found in the archives. Headdresses and Disney-like accessories are

omnipresent in the photographs and illustrations of indigeneity for the Semi-Centennial and make clear the kind of representation that Vizenor was discussing, and those understanding have helped me in how I discuss what I found by giving me a way to voice the kinds of created Indigeneity seen at the Oklahoma events.

This notion of curated, simulated indigeneity is echoed by Thomas King in *Inconvenient Indians,* when he says, “As a series of entertainments, Native history is an imaginative cobbling together of fears and loathings, romances and reverences, facts and fantasies into a cycle of creative performances, in Technicolor and 3-D, with accompanying soft drinks, candy, and popcorn” (20). This kind of creation, such as that seen at the Semi-Centennial, is an entertainment, but it is also a way to control the image and clean it up any way that suits the narrative the creator is trying to sell to their audience. Even the word “Indian” is a creation. It is all a story, and it is a story with a purpose to create out of a bloody history something that is easier to handle, something novel. In the stories told at the Semi-Centennial events, Indians exist as little more than a prop, something separate, something exotic and other as discussed by Eva Marie Garroutte in *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* as, "In short, the logic of cultural definitions commonly constructs culture as a mysterious something that only exists apart from intentional human activity. It can never 'come into being'; it must forever 'be preexistent'...” (68). When images of Indigenous peoples are limited to only those that are immediately recognizable through the lens of Hollywood, and the histories of those people are rewritten to fit a specific idea, the erasure of the reality of the people and individual histories continues.

**The Creation of "Identity"**

The discussion of the rhetorical and intentional creation of identity is also something that that is very helpful to the ways in which I understand the concept of Indigeneity seen at the '57 events. In order to find the stories that I sought, I had to look beyond the pages and pictures, and instead, I had to look at the people. But then the question remained, Why? Who cares about how some oil executive types over 50 years ago portrayed Indigenous people in Oklahoma? It is because there are repercussions to these stories for the peoples about which they are told that echo out beyond this specific series of events and the time period in which it took place. "Even when cultural definitions of identity are based upon stereotypes and unrealistic ideas about Indians, the consequences of being judged non-Indian by this standard can be very real" (Garroutte 70). I think about the images of native folks that I saw in relation to the event, and I thought about those that I have seen and have written about in contemporary Oklahoma travel spaces. The Indians are seemingly always in full regalia, as if this is the only way they can exist as native peoples.

Cultural Rhetorics also offers me the lens to view and discuss the stories at the event and to make clear the ways in which the people, the stories, the land cannot be separated from one another in these *storied places,* and how these are important distinctions that have implications beyond an event in Oklahoma. The creation of identity, both by the self and through the view of others is something discussed in Cultural Rhetorics in regard to the ways in which dominant paradigms dictate these views. In "Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway says:

> In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics the tradition of racist, male dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the

> reflections of the other the relation … has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. (292)

While she was discussing the merging of humanity and that of the machine, I find her discussion of the ways in which an individual's idea of self and that held by others as a place of cultural misunderstanding to be useful. Culture cannot be separated from the person, and the cultural practices and understandings of self and the community are too deeply connected. This impossibility of the separation of culture and understanding is also seen when the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab scholars discuss the way that Cultural Rhetorics scholarship views culture as something inseparable from the ways we understand the world around us, not only as scholars, but as parts of a larger whole, saying, "...we mean scholarship that identifies 'culture' as an object of inquiry, one that cannot be isolated from other human, economic, political, geographical, historical frameworks that exist around and within it" ("Our Story Begins Here,'" Act 1.1). Using this model as a way to view the impact that constructed stories of Indigenous peoples seen at the Semi-Centennial, in research done *on* instead of with Indigenous peoples, and ongoingly in popular media allows for the space to better explore how efforts to include cultural understanding and inclusion in academic scholarship can aid in the decolonization of educational spaces and practices like archival research and object analysis. In "Blood and Scholarship," Powell discusses how, as an Indigenous scholar, I, and those who have come before and will follow after, are limited by the narratives and histories about Indians, saying:

> It would seem that an Indian scholar is in an impossible bind. Limited the master narratives constructing her, the stories she can tell *that will be heard* are limited. What I am suggesting is that there are some stories that can be told and heard, like this story I am

telling, revelatory stories that open space for counter-stories and resistance… (*Race, Rhetoric, and Composition 8)*

This is the move I am attempting to make by investigating and retelling some of the stories from the Semi-Centennial. I am making space for the Indians in these stories as they exist in the archives today and in this document.

**Teepees and Towering Tales: Oklahoma Indians as Told by the Semi-Centennial**


*Figure 18 Image of several people dressed in Indigenous garments standing in front of a teepee. A woman in Western-Style dress walks past in the foreground. JoAnn Neihart and Lee Reeder Collection Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, Oklahoma City, OK*

This is a story about a series of stories, and about how they still have influence, even now, 50 years later. There is a great deal of power taken by controlling the image/s and story/ies of a person or a people. In the case of the Semi-Centennial, the use of native imagery and the narratives presented in the ephemera and in the advertisements created for the event represent a power imbalance that is significant to the history of the state, and useful in understanding the power that this kind of control can have outside of Oklahoma and in the rest of the country.

To shift focus to specific rhetorical artifacts I have gathered for my own personal collection and that I touched and inspected in the archives, it was not difficult to quickly see the story that the 1957 Semi-Centennial and the materials created for it told. In them, the settlers of Oklahoma and their modern counterparts are the all-American cowboys, rugged and intrepid people of the frontier, looking to build a life in the newly opened and oil rich Indian territories, and the Indigenous people the noble braves, victims of unfortunate circumstances, seeking refuge in the territory, whimsically still entrenched in the past. Even when the materials for the event mention atrocities like the removals, they are glossed over. An example of this can be found in the "History" section of the Special Semi-Centennial edition of *Oklahoma Today*, it is boldly


*Figure 19 Image of several people dressed in Indigenous garments standing in front of a teepee. A woman in Western-Style dress talks with them while an Indigenous woman plays a drum. JoAnn Neihart and Lee Reeder Collection Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, Oklahoma City, OK*

stated, "It all happened in Oklahoma" (Burchardt 8). The author, Bill Burchardt, goes on, discussing the history of the state:

> First came the Spaniards, looking for gold. Then the French, looking for an empire. Then the traders, looking for business. Then the Indians, looking for a home. With the Indians came tragedy; a displaced people, a wandering people, who sang poetic songs about the wind, the animals, who fought savagely for the wild land they loved. (*Oklahoma Today* "History" 8)

Images from the event echo this sentiment, as in the images above, we can see the Indigenous peoples of the event, dressed and presented in front of a teepee and paired alongside actors dressed in Wild West costumes. Here their Indigeneity is seen as something that is in the same cultural situation of that of the cowboy actors they are seen alongside. The Indians, like the buckskin and fringe wearing cowfolks they are presented with, are a thing of the past, in this narrative.

In the version of the story told in the ephemera and in the archival photographs, Oklahoma was seemingly an empty frontier, waiting to be colonized for profit and power, and the Indians in the story are near picture perfect versions of the noble savage. A "displaced people" looking for a home. They are Disney's Pocahontas, singing of the wind and the animals. This is not to say that there were no songs sung, there certainly were, but this image of the events of the removal, a death march, and the peoples who were forced on it is so sanitized as to be nearly laughably unrecognizable. And, like Angela Haas tells us, "… there is a long Western rhetorical tradition of constructing American Indians— via print, visual, oral, and digital compositions— in stereotypical, essential used, and fetishized ways that contribute to a larger, monolithic fiction of who/what is the 'the American Indian'" (Haas 189). Haas continues:

> Indigenous peoples in the Americas have always been rhetorically constructed by Europeans since their conquest of the Americas. These incomplete and inaccurate

> representations of Indian us have deep and firm roots in the US colonial imagery, have rhetorical velocity across the globe, and contribute to larger colonial rhetorics about global indigenous people. ("Toward a Decolonial Digital and Visual American Indian Rhetorics Pedagogy" 192)

This was a creation. Something cooked up to make the visitors to the event feel as if they are being told a history with just enough sorrow to mean something, to give them an experience. Identity, in a Cultural Rhetorics discussion, allows the stories to be the object and to constellate between disciplines. Not just historiography, but a collection of stories about power and relationships

This is, of course, not a unique happening. This was not some new slight that Oklahoma thrust upon wide-eyed guests of the events, and it is not something that began and ended at the Semi-Centennial or even only in Oklahoma. Jane C. Desmond discussed just this thing in regard to indigenous Hawaiians saying, "...cultural tourism provided the wealthy vacationer with a dose of anthropological contact with selected "primitives"—just enough to reinvigorate through exposure to the "authentic" and the "natural" those visitors worn to ennui from the deadening pressures of modern, urban life." (Desmond). While Desmond was discussing Hawaii, there is a stark parallel in the way in which Oklahoma is billed. At the Semi-Centennial, Oklahoma Indians Are seemingly reduced to only this portion of indigeneity. Their history is reduced to a single tragic wandering entity, savage and singing. This history of Oklahoma and its native residents, one of forced removal and broken treaties, is boxed up and sold to visitors to the event.

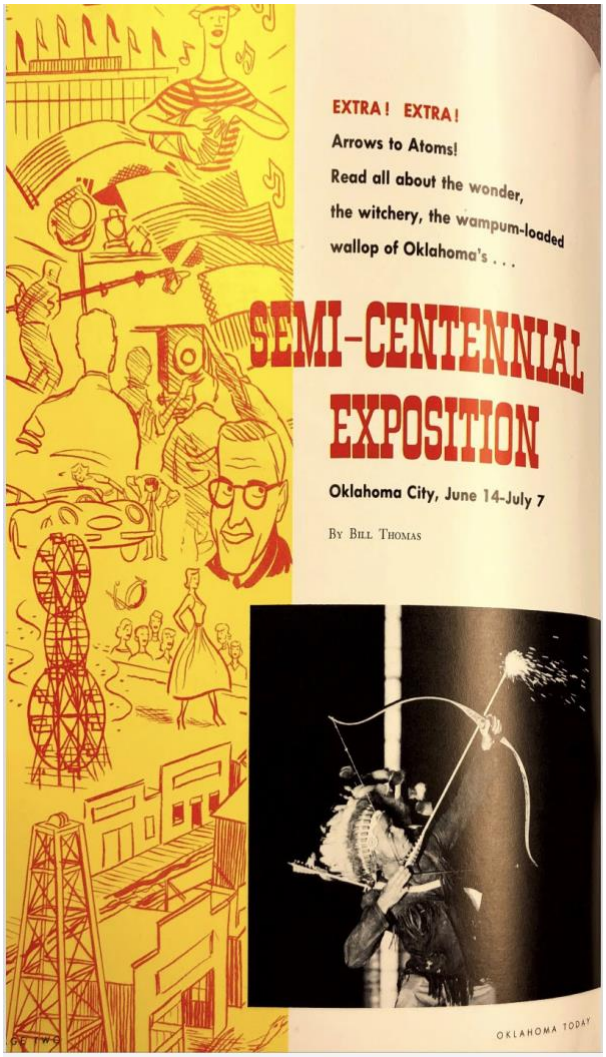



*Figure 20 Inside Page the special edition of* Oklahoma Today *for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: Arrows to Atoms! Read all about the wonder, the witchery, the wampum-loaded wallop of Oklahoma's Semi-Centennial Exposition featuring images of Oklahoma industry and a photograph of a man in a war bonnet shooting a sparkler arrow into the sky. Oklahoma Historical Society Archives 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma City, OK*

In the scan from the special issue of *Oklahoma Today* printed for the event, we see an example of the kind of manifested images of native peoples that are scattered throughout the event and its branding. The left full-page image's text invites visitors to the event to join in the "...wonder, the witchery, the wampum-loaded wallop of Oklahoma's Semi-Centennial Exposition" (Thomas 2). Under the text, we see an image of a man dressed in a headdress and fringe, readying himself to shoot an arrow tipped with a sparkler. These are the Indians of the

Semi-Centennial. Even if the man in the photo was Native (There is no way to tell from the photo and no credit for the image or the model is given), this is still a facsimile of Indigeneity.

Thomas King discussed the ways in which these created versions of Indians were/are archetypal, and something seen across media of many forms, "The was the bloodthirsty savage, the noble savage, and the dying savage...You could mix and match these Indians. The bloodthirsty Indian might also be the dying Indian...The good news is that none of these Indians was a threat" (34-35). These created Indians do not come with the weight and guilt of their history. Powell when discussing Cultural Rhetorics in the archives in terms of Indigenous peoples says:

> What we are talking about is a collusion of events during colonization-the documents and histories written *about* Native peoples by folks who had something to lose if Indians were seen as fully human, the laws and treaties that authorized brutality and genocide in all of the Americas, the forced learning of English at the hands of missionaries and in boarding schools, the continuing devaluement of the oral for the written (or the virtual), and the continuing ignorance of most U.S. citizens about the story of colonization and of imperialism and its continuing consequences. ("Dreaming Charles Eastman" 116)


*Figure 21 Cover for Pamphlet for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: Come to Oklahoma Semi-Centennial April 22-Nov. 16 featuring a Kewpie Doll-style child wearing a vest, loin cloth, and war bonnet with the Semi-Centennial shield crest in the corner. Oklahoma City Historical Society Archives 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma City, OK*

The Images and texts for the event, invoking Indigenous themes, have only just enough of a story to mark them as *other*, and in the instances that we see these Indians, that is plenty. This reduction of Native peoples to something less of a threat to the settler visitors to the Semi-Centennial is something seen in the characterization of Indians in the illustrated images from the

ephemera. Whether it is the Kewpie Doll, copper-red infantilized version of Indigeneity seen above or the scowling native making his Neverland cartoon Indian style war woop, seemingly menacing the startled looking cowboy as seen to his right, the illustrations of Indigenous peoples made for the event make clear the images of Indigeneity that were intended to be portrayed in these spaces.


*Figure 22 Inside page of the special edition of* Oklahoma Today *for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: Extra! Extra! Teepees to Towers! Read about the state that's one big Wild West Show from Border to border! Read all about Oklahoma's Semi-Centennial Celebration statewide April 22-November 16 feature cartoon images of an Indian in a headdress holding a tomahawk above his head and a cowboy, looking surprised behind photographs of a teepee and a man on horseback, holding an American flag. Oklahoma Historical Society Archives 11 Jan 2019, Oklahoma City, OK*

**Adverts Made for the Event**

One of the more obvious, and in many cases insidious, ways in which Indigenous peoples and imagery were invoked for the event as something primitive was in the form of the advertisements created for the event and its ephemera. In the following examples, it is clear that the only form of "Indigeneity" feature is that of the Hollywood manufactured Indian. Hawk-nosed and shirtless, Indigenous people are seen represented in many of the harmful stereotypes of the era


*Figure 23 Advertisement from the March 20th, 1957 Special Edition of the* Tulsa Tribune. *Text reads: Then and Now. The Famous Crestliner safest boats afloat. Before you buy any boat see the CRESTLINER and make your own comparisons. Then you'll know CRESTLINER is truly America's finest aluminum watercraft and features an illustrated image of two Indigenous people paddling a canoe above a photograph of a family in a motorboat. 21 Jan 2019 Tulsa Historical Society Archives, Tulsa, OK*

(and, unfortunately, today as well.) When I was in the archives, included with the ephemera was a fair number of newspapers from the era. In these papers, I was able to see another, more

public-facing version of these images that were created for the event. In these spaces, it becomes clear the ways in which stereotypical versions of Indigeneity were invoked and commodified, often being used to show the ways the Indians are figures of Oklahoma's past and old ways of understanding or doing things, continuing the narrative of control that places Indigeneity as only historical. This notion reminds me of when Scott Lyons declared that, "There is good reason to fear for a future where signs of modernity are considered always already antithetical to Indigeneity" ("Actually Existing" 305).

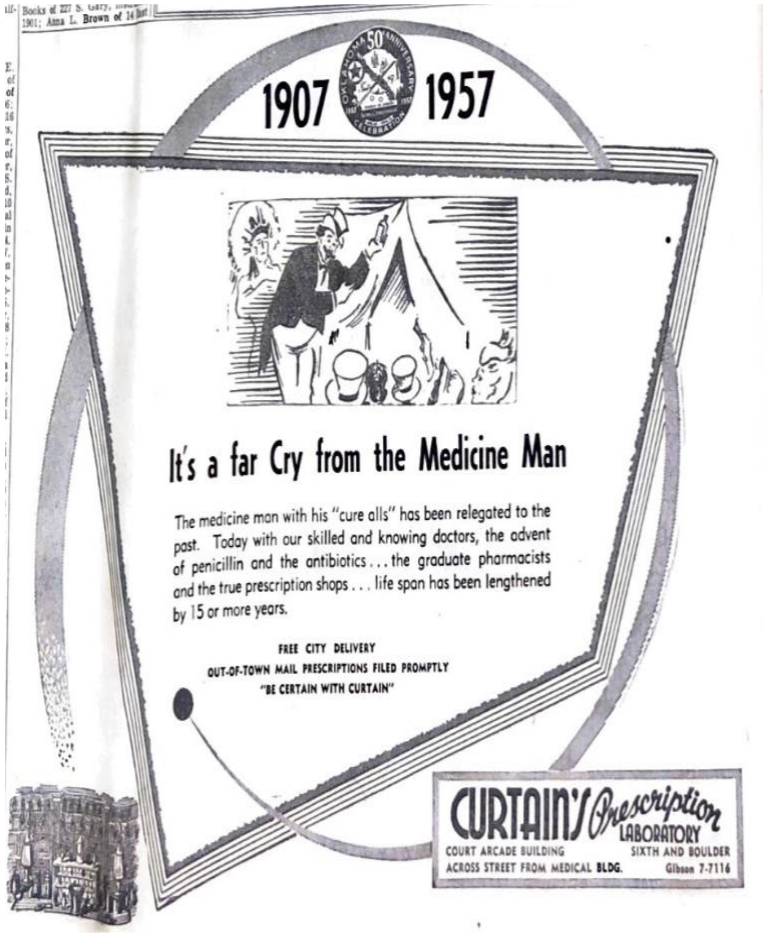



*Figure 24 Advertisement from the March 20th, 1957 Special Edition of the* Tulsa Tribune. *Text reads: 1907-1957 It's a far cry from the medicine man. The medicine man with his "cure alls" has been relegated to the past. Today with our skilled and knowing doctors, the advent of penicillin and the antibiotics… the graduate pharmacists and the true prescription shops… life span has been lengthened by 15 or more years. Featuring an illustration of a "snake oil" salesman in front of a tent speaking to a crowd with a man in a war bonnet looking over his shoulder. 21 Jan 2019 Tulsa Historical Society Archives, Tulsa, OK*

In both the 'boat advertisement' seen above and in the pharmacy advert seen just to the left, the practices of Indigenous peoples are used to show how far the people of Oklahoma (though, seemingly not the Indigenous people) have come since the "primitive" practices of Indian Territory. Whether it is the "cure alls" of the "medicine man" that Curtain's pharmacy sees itself as something far beyond or the *clear* [Sarcasm] superiority of the Crestline craft to the "traditional" canoe.

While there are certainly major issues with the version of the Indigenous ways of doing and knowing that are portrayed in the previous examples, there are, however, other issues that I found that bring to light even more sinister versions of the ways in which Indigeneity is displayed in the ads. Something that has interested me in other research projects and something that I intend to revisit once this dissertation is complete is Indigenous heritage language revitalization. The efforts being taken by contemporary Indigenous peoples and communities to take back their languages, languages that were often removed through force and violence is, in my opinion, one of the most significant acts of what Gerald Vizenor calls *survivance* (Survival + resistance).

According to Vizenor, "Native Survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuation of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent" (*Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* 1). In the examples to which I am referring, seen below, Indigenous language (specifically Cherokee, in these examples) are used along with images of Native folks as a way to mark speakers of the language as *other*. In the first example for Tom's Upholstery, the text reads (in English script) "ha TcR Thfwa AD." Readers of the advertisement are told that this wouldn't mean anything unless you were a

"Cherokee Indian" or a "Student of Sequoyah's greatest achievement!" The Cherokee text is listed as being John 3:28, translated in Cherokee. However, it simply misses the mark, and further, the image of a native person featured on the ad is not Cherokee either. As with pretty much all of the images of Native folks at the event, the person featured in the Cherokee language advertisement is seen as wearing a headdress. I can only imagine that the traditional

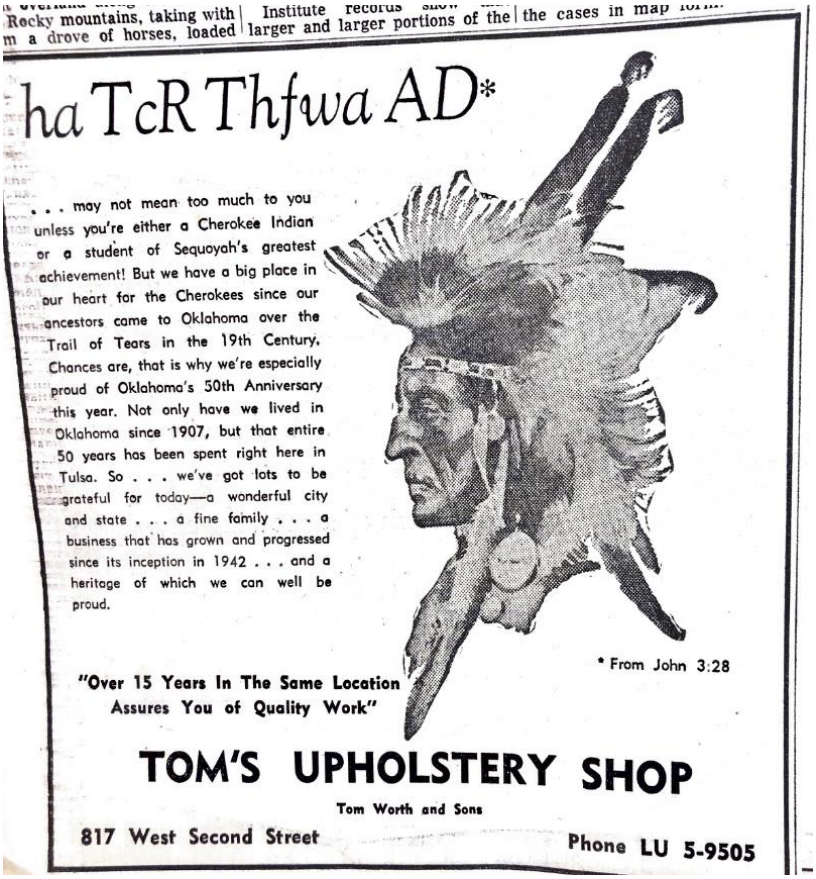



*Figure 25 Advertisement from the March 20th, 1957 Special Edition of the* Tulsa Tribune. *Text reads: ha TcR Thfwa AD* ...may not mean too much to you unless you're either a Cherokee Indian or a student of Sequoyah's greatest achievement! But we have a big place in our heart for the Cherokees since our ancestors came to Oklahoma over the Trail of Tears in the 19th century. Chances are, that's why we're especially proud of Oklahoma's 50th Anniversary this year. Not only have we lived in Oklahoma since 1907, but that entire 50 years has been spent right here in Tulsa. So… we've got lots to be grateful for today — a wonderful city and state… a fine family…a business that has grown and progressed since its inception in 1942…and a heritage of which we can well be proud. Over 50 years in the same location assures you quality of work. Tom's Upholstery Shop. Featuring an image of a man wearing an Indigenous headdress. 21 Jan 2019 Tulsa Historical Society Archives, Tulsa, OK*

turban or top lock of the Cherokee would not have been immediately recognizable as Cherokee enough.

As I am a Cherokee language learner and someone who grew up in Tahlequah, OK, where the majority of the text found in public spaces is in both Cherokee and English, I went and looked at the actual translation of this verse through the Cherokee Bible project. John 3:28 in Cherokee would read phonetically, "Ni-hi i-tsv-sv i-tsi-ga-ta-hi hi-a tsi-ni-tsi-we-s-gv-gi; A-yv v-tla Ga-lo-ne-dv yi-gi, v-gi-nv-si-dv-quo-s-gi-ni i-gv-yi tsi-ye-nv-e-hi" (*Cherokee Bible Project* John 3:28). The ad seems to simply be depending on the fact that the majority of the readers would not be familiar enough with the language to be able to see the wild disparity in the text versus the actual language, and that the English letters that are sort of shaped like the syllabary would be enough. This further seems to assume that there would be no Cherokee speakers reading this advertisement, despite the fact that Oklahoma was and still is the post removal location of two of the three bands of the Cherokee people. Indigenous people are invoked, but they are sequestered away as something of the past.

The second example of an advertisement (the Falstaff Beer ad seen below) brings to attention another, deeply troubling use of a heritage language being used to promote a product, in this case combined with another racist image of a native person. The advertisement's tomato-red, large nosed, feather-wearing caricature of Indigeneity smiles as he points toward an image of the Cherokee syllabary. The text reads, "if you can't spell it…" (the "Cherokee points at the syllabary) "...ask for it!!" (He smiles, holding a bottle of the beer.) This particular advertisement was actually the first one I encountered in my data collection in the archives, and my first reaction to the ad was immediately to the red face, but when I actually took a second to think about it, I was even more put off by the implications of the text. A quick (probably non-academic Google search) showed that this is not an ad that was found other places. It does not show up if you search any combination of "Falstaff Advertisement 1957 Cherokee). This is something that

was made specifically for the event, specifically for Oklahoma, the place where the Cherokee would be (and still are).


*Figure 26 Advertisement from the special edition of Oklahoma Today for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: ...if you can't spell it...ask for it featuring an image of the Cherokee syllabary and two images of an offensive stereotypical red-faced Indian, holding a beer in one and the Falstaff beer logo. Oklahoma Historical Society Archives 11 Jan 2019, Oklahoma City, OK.*

This repeated notion that there not only would be no Cherokee speakers that would see the not-Cherokee Cherokee advertisement, or that 1957 speakers of Cherokee would be

seemingly be illiterate and unable to spell the name of the beer brings me to the next important question that I would like to discuss; where were the Indigenous people at this event? The schedules and billing for the event ensured readers they would have a chance to experience some "authentic" Native Americans at the event, so where were they in the ephemera and how did they feel about it?

**T-Town Tom Tom: Finally, some fucking Indians**

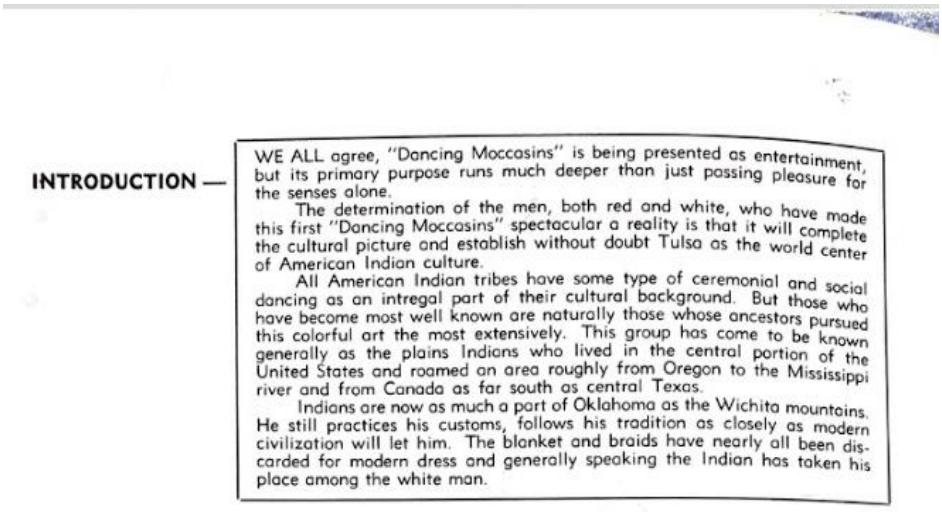
As mentioned before, Oklahoma has long been home to a very large Indigenous population; this has been the case since it was still known as "Indian Territory," pre statehood. While many of the documents specifically make note of the significant native presence in the state, there were few that seemed to actually display any attempt at a portrayal of actual Indigenous people or imagery. This is not, however, to say that there was none. It would be unfair of me to say that everything I found in the archives showed only a cartoon version of the Native peoples of Oklahoma. Just like in the state itself, they were always there. Despite all of the Disneyfication, the native presence in Oklahoma was apparent in the archival materials as well.

Of all of the things that I found in the archives that made any attempt at telling Indian tales, one particular document showed a level of self-awareness that was surprising. The Tulsa location for the '57 event, Tulsarama, featured an exposition called "T-Town Tom Tom." and an event called 'Dancing Moccasins." Even before beginning the formal research for this project, I had honestly made a lot of assumptions about what the native population of Oklahoma at the time thought about the event, and more so, what the native peoples involved in the event thought about it and their participation. Finding this souvenir brochure in the Oklahoma Historical Society collection offered me a chance that I never thought I would have, considering what so

much of what I had seen in the collections up to this point. The ephemera of the "Indian Spectacular" of the T-Town Tom-Tom and its accompanying brochure were such a welcome change from all of the other things I had seen up to this point.

The T-Town Tom Tom "Dancing Moccasins" brochure, despite its name, was the first place that I saw anything, any graphic, any copy text, that seemed to even touch on any real imagery of native folks or practices. The first thing that caught my eye about this document was the cover. Here I saw something that I recognized as *Indigenous Art.* The figure on the cover is painted in a style that is more traditionally associated with art made by Indigenous people. The regalia and body positioning is a more accurate depiction of regalia than any others I had seen.


*Figure 27 Front Cover of the T-Town Tom Tom: Dancing Moccasins Brochure. Text reads: T-Town Tom Tom presents dancing moccasins. Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Indian Spectacular presented at Tulsa, OK June 1-8, 1957 as Sponsored by the Tulsa Junior Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with Golden Jubilee, INC. Featuring a painting of a blue Indigenous Dancer in regalia and the artist's signature (Blue Eagle). 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK*



**INTRODUCTION —**

WE ALL agree, "Dancing Moccasins" is being presented as entertainment, but its primary purpose runs much deeper than just passing pleasure for the senses alone.

The determination of the men, both red and white, who have made this first "Dancing Moccasins" spectacular a reality is that it will complete the cultural picture and establish without doubt Tulsa as the world center of American Indian culture.

All American Indian tribes have some type of ceremonial and social dancing as an intregal part of their cultural background. But those who have become most well known are naturally those whose ancestors pursued this colorful art the most extensively. This group has come to be known generally as the plains Indians who lived in the central portion of the United States and roamed an area roughly from Oregon to the Mississippi river and from Canada as far south as central Texas.

Indians are now as much a part of Oklahoma as the Wichita mountains. He still practices his customs, follows his tradition as closely as modern civilization will let him. The blanket and braids have nearly all been discarded for modern dress and generally speaking the Indian has taken his place among the white man.

*Figure 28 Text box from the Introduction of the T-Town Tom Tom Brochure from the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Text. reads: We all agree "Dancing Moccasins" is being presented as entertainment, but, its primary purpose runs much deeper than just passing pleasure for the senses alone. The determination of the men, both red and white, who have made this first 'Dancing Moccasins" spectacular a reality is that it will complete the cultural picture and establish without doubt Tulsa as the world center of American Indian culture, All American Indian tribes have some kind of ceremonial and social dancing as an integral part of their cultural background. But those who have become most well-known are naturally those whose ancestors pursued this colorful art the most extensively. This group has become generally as the plains Indians who lived in the central portion of the United States and roamed an area roughly from Oregon to the Mississippi River and from Canada as far south as central Texas. Indians are now as much a part of Oklahoma as the Wichita mountains. He still practices his customs, follows his traditions as closely as modern civilization will allow him. The blanket and braids have nearly all been discarded for modern dress and generally speaking the Indian has taken his place among the whites. 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma City Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK*

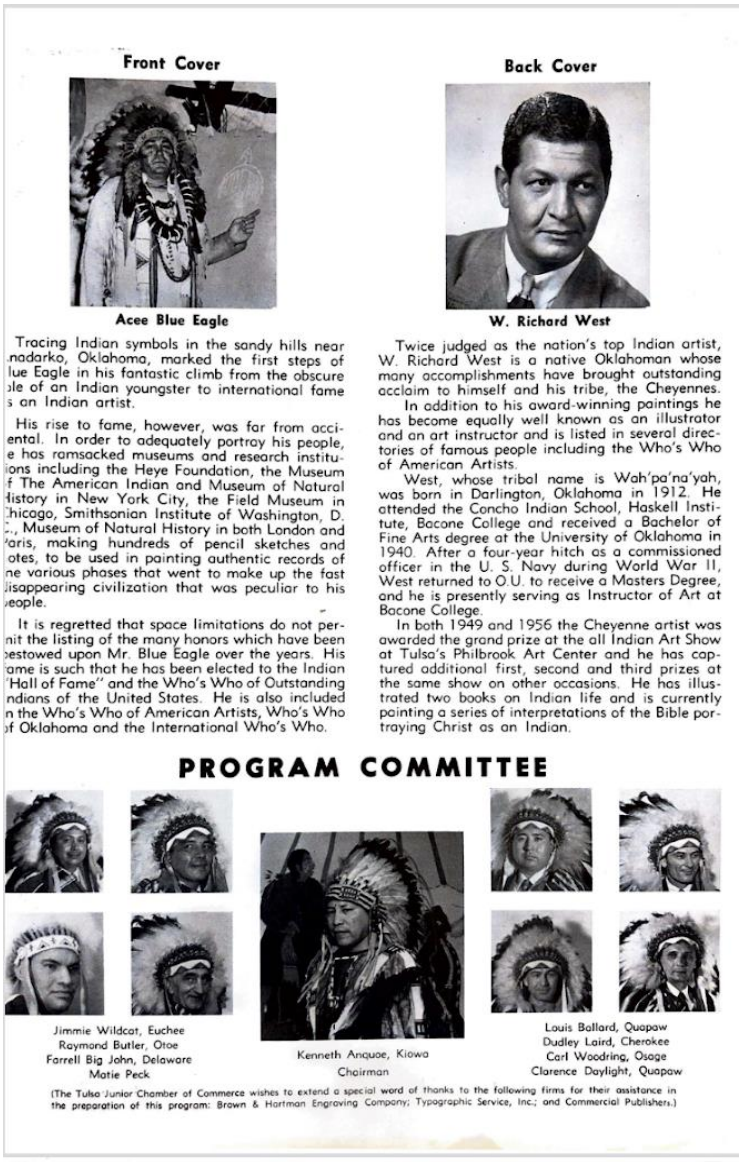
This is also the first time I saw an artist's name associated with the work. Inside the cover there was also a brief write up on the artist. Another thing missing from all other drawing/painting of Indigenous peoples that had all seemed to have come from whatever the 1950s Oklahoma version of clipart would have been.

Within the brochure, some of the Indigenous opinions on the event and the way things like Indigenous practices and ways of dress were being portrayed become clearer. In this document is also the brief introduction in the image below. This small box of text is perhaps the most self-aware document from any of the collections or documents that I encountered. Here we see an open acknowledgment that the "Dancing Moccasins" spectacular is "presented as

entertainment." The little blurb goes on to say that there is a deeper purpose for the dances and ceremonies that will be featured at the Semi-Centennial, to make sure that the "cultural picture" created at the event is one that includes Indigenous people and helps to "establish without a doubt Tulsa as the world center of American Indian culture" (*T-Town Tom Tom 1).* So, while this is only one small piece of what must be a much larger picture, this little piece of insight makes clear that while it is a show, while it is entertainment, it is also an important part of Oklahoma's residents' history that should be included, and the "Dancing Moccasins" (or maybe just its flyer) seems to have been the place where the native voices were given a chance to speak.

I think it is also important to note that even within this seemingly Indigenous part of the events, that there was still a fair amount of "window dressing" going on when it came to how the Native folks were represented. As can be seen on the inside front cover of the brochure, featured below, there is the acknowledgment of the artists who painted the images on the front and back covers, as well as a small bio of the authors. This is important, to acknowledge the time and efforts as well as the story of where the art came from. Both men are famous artists in Oklahoma and a recognizable name to most any folks familiar with Indigenous art in the area (Acee Blue Eagle painted a mural in my hometown, Tahlequah, OK, that is still there today), and it was heartening to recognize a name in the materials. However, there are also the images for the program committee. The men are listed by name and tribal affiliation, which I appreciate, but they are also all featured wearing the same war bonnet, making sure that viewers would know for sure that these were *bona fide* Indians, "See! They have on the headdress! This is a real Indian thing!" This, of course, pays no attention whatsoever to the fact that the headdress would not be

a part of the traditional dress for the vast majority of these men, so it's not perfect, but it is something.



Front Cover



Acee Blue Eagle

Tracing Indian symbols in the sandy hills near nadarko, Oklahoma, marked the first steps of lue Eagle in his fantastic climb from the obscure ole of an Indian youngster to international fame s an Indian artist.

His rise to fame, however, was far from acci- ental. In order to adequately portray his people, e has ramsacked museums and research institu- ions including the Heye Foundation, the Museum f The American Indian and Museum of Natural listory in New York City, the Field Museum in hicago, Smithsonian Institute of Washington, D. ., Museum of Natural History in both London and aris, making hundreds of pencil sketches and otes, to be used in painting authentic records of ne various phases that went to make up the fast isappearing civilization that was peculiar to his eople.

It is regretted that space limitations do not per- nit the listing of the many honors which have been estowed upon Mr. Blue Eagle over the years. His ame is such that he has been elected to the Indian "Hall of Fame" and the Who's Who of Outstanding ndians of the United States. He is also included n the Who's Who of American Artists, Who's Who f Oklahoma and the International Who's Who.

Back Cover



W. Richard West

Twice judged as the nation's top Indian artist, W. Richard West is a native Oklahoman whose many accomplishments have brought outstanding acclaim to himself and his tribe, the Cheyennes.

In addition to his award-winning paintings he has become equally well known as an illustrator and an art instructor and is listed in several directories of famous people including the Who's Who of American Artists.

West, whose tribal name is Wah'pa'na'yah, was born in Darlington, Oklahoma in 1912. He attended the Concho Indian School, Haskell Institute, Bacone College and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Oklahoma in 1940. After a four-year hitch as a commissioned officer in the U. S. Navy during World War II, West returned to O.U. to receive a Masters Degree, and he is presently serving as Instructor of Art at Bacone College.

In both 1949 and 1956 the Cheyenne artist was awarded the grand prize at the all Indian Art Show at Tulsa's Philbrook Art Center and he has captured additional first, second and third prizes at the same show on other occasions. He has illustrated two books on Indian life and is currently painting a series of interpretations of the Bible portraying Christ as an Indian.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE



Jimmie Wildcat, Euchee
Raymond Butler, Otoe
Farrell Big John, Delaware
Matie Peck

Kenneth Anquoe, Kiowa
Chairman

Louis Ballard, Quapaw
Dudley Laird, Cherokee
Carl Woodring, Osage
Clarence Daylight, Quapaw

(The Tulsa Junior Chamber of Commerce wishes to extend a special word of thanks to the following firms for their assistance in the preparation of this program: Brown & Hartman Engraving Company; Typographic Service, Inc.; and Commercial Publishers.)

*Figure 29 Artist and Committee page for the T-Town Tom Tom Brochure featuring artist biographies for Acee Blue Eagle and W. Richard West with their photos. The bottom of the page features photographs pf the 9 committee members, all men wearing the same Plains-Style war bonnet. Their tribal affiliations are listed under the photos. 11 Jan. 2019 Oklahoma City Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK*

T-Town Tom Toms/ Dancing Moccasins was not, however, the only place that I was able to find traces of a more authentic version of Indigeneity in the archival materials; it was just the

only one that I found that was explicitly noted to have been put together by Native folks. There were other traces of something more real, something that didn't seem like it was taken from the pages of a western dime novel. As mentioned above, the contents of the souvenir edition of *Oklahoma Today,* certainly had its problems, but it also had the beautiful front and back covers included below that feature a dancer on the front and a woman weaving with a child on the back cover. In both of these images, again, the regalia/clothing and the practices of dance and weaving shown on the covers are more recognizable as more authentic images of Indigeneity.

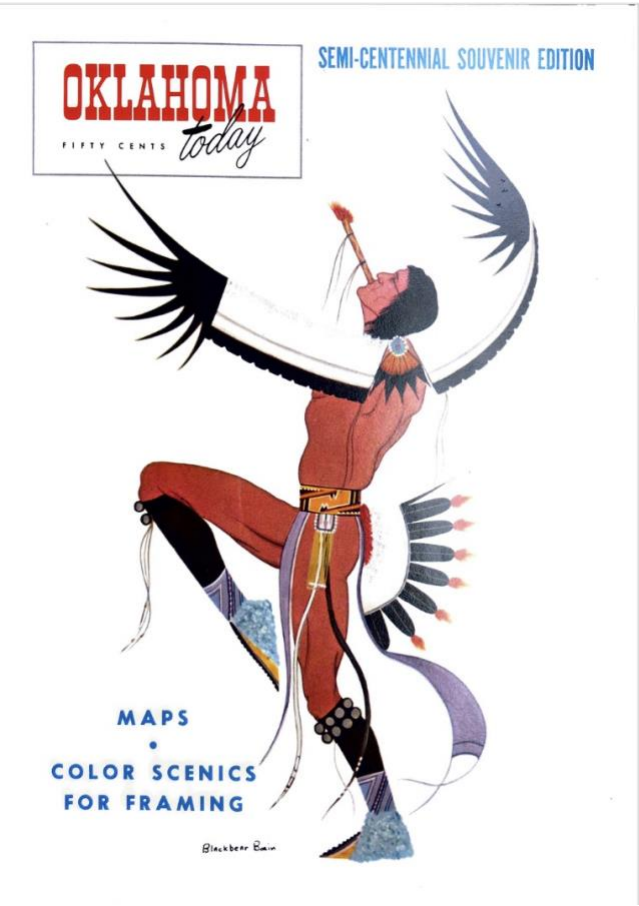



*Figure 30 Front cover of the Special Edition of Oklahoma Today for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial. Text reads: Oklahoma Today fifty cents. Maps. Color Scenics for framing. Featuring a painting of an Indigenous man in eagle regalia, playing a flute while dancing and the artist's signature (Blackbear Bain). 11 Jan 2019 Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK*

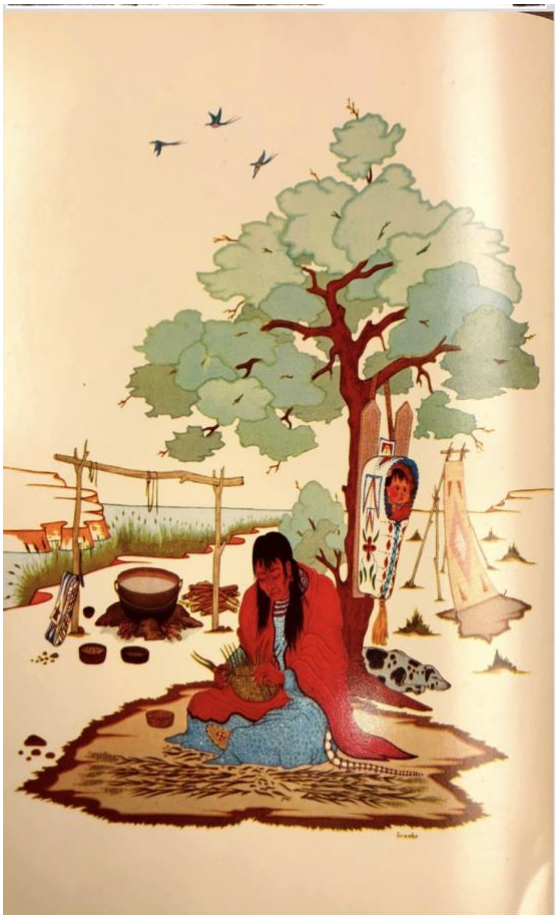


*Figure 31 Back Cover of the Special Edition of Oklahoma Today for the 1957 Oklahoma Semi Centennial featuring an image of an Indigenous woman weaving a basket in from of a camp site with a baby in a cradleboard with a blanket in the background. 11 Jan 2019, Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Oklahoma City, OK*

Other examples of a more recognizable Indigeneity I found scattered throughout the documents were often accompanied by the few and far between places where a less sanitized version of Oklahoma's history were found, like in the introduction of the T-Town Tom Tom brochure discussed above. There definitely seemed to be a link, as far as the construction of the documents themselves, that the places of more authentic versions of how the state was populated and more culturally aware images of Indigeneity exist.

To be completely honest, I went into the archives with some pretty cynical views of the events and the ways in which the Native peoples of my home were represented, but I also went in with the understanding that this would only be a small part of the picture. In this chapter, I have worked to show the ways in which the native peoples of Oklahoma, much like the land of Oklahoma itself, were used and commodified in order to not only continue and support the white-washed narrative of the history of the relationship between Oklahoma and the Indigenous peoples who lived and were forced to live there. Further, this practice of reducing all Native folks to a single Hollywood like entity is a way in which the cultural genocide of Indigenous Americans was made profitable and continues a narrative of erasure. In the next chapter, I want to move the clock forward, and I will discuss how this commodification has continued in Oklahoma, the elements and practices of Indigenous futurisms that are actively pushing against that narrative, and what all of this means to the discipline of Composition and Rhetoric beyond the bloody borders of Oklahoma and out on the rest of Turtle Island.

This is a story, but it is one that is not finished.

# Chapter 5: Both a Conclusion and a Looking Forward

## Pandemic Dissertating

As I finish this dissertation project and prepare for the next stage in my life, the world around me is in terrible flux. I am trapped inside as the deadly pandemic COVID-19 sweeps across the globe and through my various communities in both Oklahoma and here in Michigan. This spring everything has been put on hold or cancelled, and I am forced to end my time in graduate school and in Michigan in a way that I never expected, no graduation, no family coming to Michigan to see me walk across the stage for my third and final time, no chance to spend time with the friends and community I have made here in Michigan before I have to move away to start my new job.

My partner and I recently had a lengthy talk about how we are living through a historical moment, something that will be in history books and memories world-over and for generations to come. There is something about investigating and analyzing moments in history as one unfolds around me. This makes me think about how this time of uncertainty and separation will be talked about in the future. Will the history books include the instances of hoarding and fear that dominate the news? Will future historians talk about the way it has been arguably wildly mishandled by the US government? Will they talk about the instances of racial discrimination and violence that have befallen Asian folks since it has spread beyond China? Or will these things, like the contentious histories in the Oklahoma stories I have shared, be sanitized and glossed over? Thinking of the stories that could be lost about the current reality sets for me a scene that well frames the connections I saw between histories, stories, people, and the Semi-Centennial.

**What I did so far**

In my previous chapters, I enacted a decolonial object analysis informed by a Cultural Rhetorics lens. To do this work, I turned to the Oklahoma and Tulsa Historical Society archives to gather images and stories created for and presented at the 1957 statehood Semi-Centennial events. This archived ephemera includes damaging stereotypical images of indigeneity, an indigeneity represented as antithetical to progress. Using a research methodology and theoretical lens drawing from an Indigenously informed Cultural Rhetorics understanding, I investigate how curated ideas of history and authenticity are used to control narratives of the past and of people, and further, how this control enacts power. Through chapters that specifically explore methodology, land, and identity, and by engaging with stories about places and peoples curated in specific environments, I offer a model for how an Indigenously informed Cultural Rhetorics methodology can illuminate and enrich composing and rhetorical practices that more thoroughly include relations between places, lands, and peoples.

In my methodology chapter, "Gathering Stories: Cultural Rhetorics Informed Archival Collecting," I described the teachings I have received from my home communities and from the scholarly voices that have guided me on my doctoral and academic journey. I discussed the ways that I constellated these ways of doing and of making knowledge into a framework that informed how I approached my story-gathering in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa Historical Societies' Archives.

After establishing the methodological moves that I made in gathering and analyzing the Oklahoma stories that I found, I moved my discussion to the history of Oklahoma as seen through the lens of both the Semi-Centennial events and my lived experiences in the state. I described the power that is enacted when certain parties

control a narrative and/or a history. as was seen at the Semi-Centennial. I covered the way that power of story was used to create a version of Oklahoma and its Indigenous residents that were used as both a window dressing for the events and as a way to discuss the story of the Indigenous peoples of Oklahoma that removes the reality of the

damages and death that came with the removals and settling of the state.

**Looking Back: Looking Forward**


*Figure 32 Image of the Northeastern State University Centennial Plaza featuring a statue of Sequoyah in the center. Seminary Hal, a large red brick building is visible in the background. Image from https://offices.nsuok.edu/humanresources/Forms/ADA-Accommodation-Request*

In 2007, Oklahoma celebrated its centennial celebration. At the time, I was an undergraduate at a small liberal arts college in my hometown of Tahlequah, OK, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, and the place where the Trail of Tears removal death march deposited my family only a few generations ago. The school, in celebration of the state's 100th birthday, built a "Centennial Plaza" surrounding a statue of Sequoyah, the creator of the written Cherokee language/syllabary that is still used today. At the time, my friends and I made jokes about how

ironic it was that a university that started life as a reform school for Indigenous girls that actively suppressed the girls speaking Cherokee now had a statue honoring Sequoyah. I have found that the juxtaposition of the past and present of Oklahoma that my friends and I were joking about is something that is still ongoing, something that still merits a closer look.

In a previous presentation I gave (2017 Conference on College Composition and Communication American Indian Caucus roundtable) I investigated the official tourism site for the state travelok.com, much in the same way I went through the archives in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Looking back now on that research and the site itself, I realize that on the website, I saw many of the same trends and themes that I saw in the 50-year-old materials from the Semi-Centennial events. Much like it was in 1957, Oklahoma is widely advertised as either the frontier or native America; a place where cowboys and Indians rode across the great plains and settlers carved out a home during the Land Run.

Even in the contemporary version of Oklahoma seen on the travel site, the Native peoples in Oklahoma are shown as the exotic, some Other that you can come and explore, something opposite of the cowboys. On *Travelok.com*, all of the images of native people that I found were, much like at the Semi-Centennial, in regalia or historical garments and at powwows. There was no mention of the contemporary, there was only the ceremonial, captured in a moment for the tourist's gaze. In these spaces, Indians are seemingly a relic of the past that has persisted into the present, apparently unhindered by the march of time and the incoming nonnative settlers. I see this connection between the way that Indigenous folks and the history of Oklahoma are displayed at the Semi-Centennial and the ways in which they are still being portrayed in visitor-facing spaces like the official travel site.

Specifically regarding the Indigenous people of Oklahoma, in the stories and the images that accompany them on travel sites for the state, I couldn't help but notice that the Indians still seemed like an artifact. They appear as some sort of anachronism that exists to add an exotic element to the narrative, just as they were used as window dressing for the Semi-Centennial over 50 years ago. When I was thinking about what the next steps are for this project once I have finished, I began to wonder about the impact that these packaged tales tell visitors to my beloved homeland today. According to *TravelOK*, tourism is Oklahoma's third largest industry (behind only oil and agriculture), so there is certainly some benefit coming to the state at least in part from the ways in which Native peoples are featured ("Oklahoma: An Authentic Wonder").

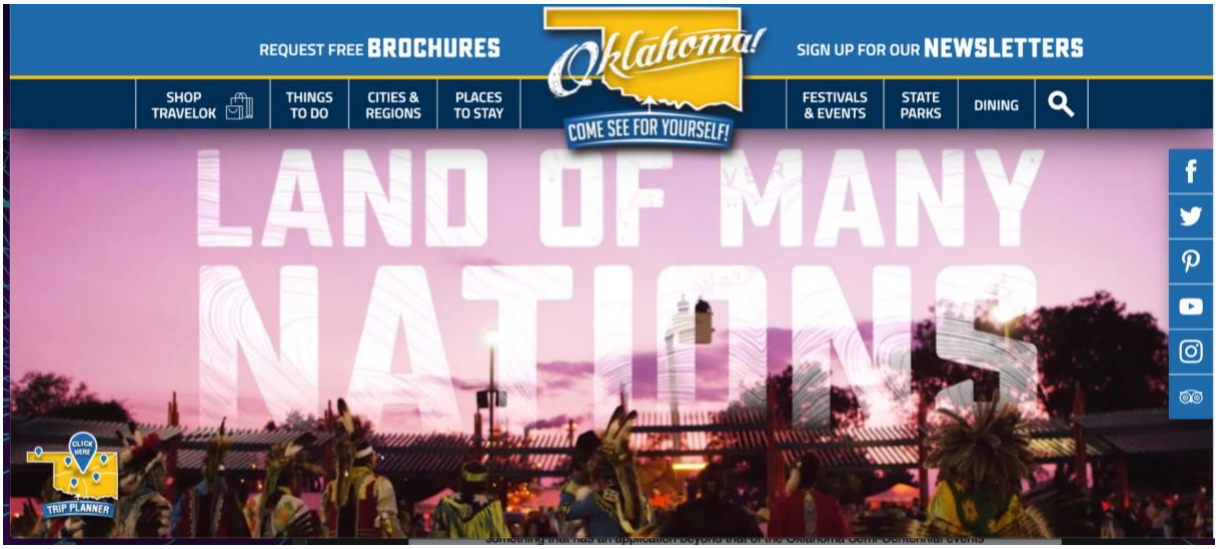



*Figure 33 Screenshot of the American Indian Culture Page on Travelok.com. Text reads: Land of Many Nations featuring an image of fancy dancers in a powwow circle at sunset. Image from https://www.travelok.com/american_indian_culture*

John Urry discussed the expectations of the tourist gaze saying, "This mode of gazing shows how tourists are in a way semioticians, reading the landscape for signifiers of certain preestablished notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism" (Urry 12). By this reasoning, it is somewhat understandable that when unfamiliar tourists are told and consider the fact that Oklahoma has a high native American population, that they are expecting

"powwow Indians," not contemporary folks going about their business. Likewise, people are not going to a tourism website and expecting to be told a story of genocide and theft.

However, the problem is that if this is the only side of Indigenous culture or Oklahoma history visitors to the site and the state are exposed to, it will continue to be all that they know. These sites are asking folks to come and engage with the land and with the people, and there are stories attached to this land. As Malea Powell said at the 2013 CCCs, "Stories, as we say, take place" and the stories that Oklahoma and its Native residents have to tell is much more than what is shown in these spaces (384). While Travelok.com has moved away from the caricature version of red-faced Indians seen at the Semi-Centennial, and the site has information for visiting places like the Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah that tells a very raw version of the Trail of Tears story, there is still work to be done regarding the way Oklahoma is storied for the consumer eye.

**Reflections and Maybe a Glimmer of Hope?**

To bring this work to a close, I would like to take a moment to turn my gaze from Oklahoma's past and look instead toward its future. Although, as I have discussed, there are still some problems with the way that Oklahoma history is being sold to the public, there are some glimmers that things are beginning to shift in the public eye. Over the last few years, there has been an uptick in a more complete history of Oklahoma being shown in unexpected places. I am hopeful that as media like those that I am about to discuss get more and more attention, a more complete version of Oklahoma will begin to form in the public consciousness.

When I was home in Oklahoma for the winter of 2018, gathering my archival stories for this project, I was able to spend some actual extended time with my family there for the first time since I moved away to Michigan two years earlier. My academic work is something that is often difficult to discuss with my family; the idea of Cultural Rhetorics is just difficult for them to pin

down. My earlier work focused a lot of social media and the kinds of discourse communities that are formed in those kinds of spaces, and my family's removal from social media and overall dismissal of it as a valid space (or use of my time) also made justifying what I was doing in school hard for them. However, when I started working on this project, suddenly there was something that we could talk about.

I am very close with my grandparents, and I feel very lucky that they are all still living, even as I rapidly approach 40. I have been blessed to have the wisdom and guidance of the grandmothers who practically raised me through my whole life. Part of the early inquiry I did into the 1957 Oklahoma Semi-Centennial, long before this dissertation was even a dream, was my sitting down with my grandparents and asking them about how people felt about the events when they were happening and if they went to any of them. I was surprised at the time to find out that not only had they not gone to any events, but that none of them even remembered them happening. One of my grandmothers vaguely recalled seeing the arrow statue at the Oklahoma City fairgrounds some years later, but nothing about the events themselves.

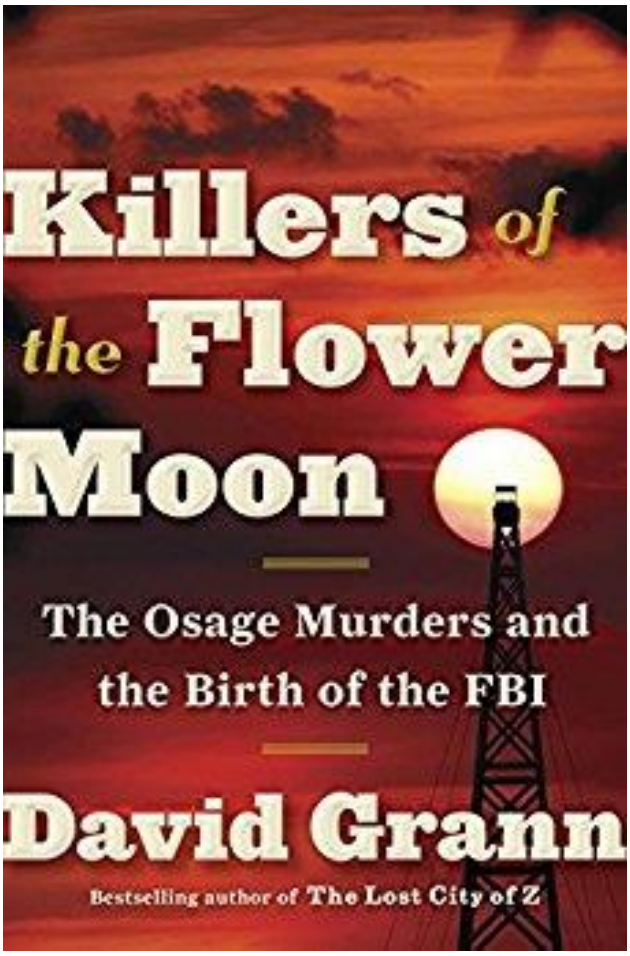



*Figure 34 Cover of the book Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann. Text reads: Killers of the Flower Moon- The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI David Grann Bestselling author of the Lost City of Z featuring an image of an oil derrick silhouetted against a sunset. Image from https://www.davidgrann.com/book/killers-of-the-flower-moon/*

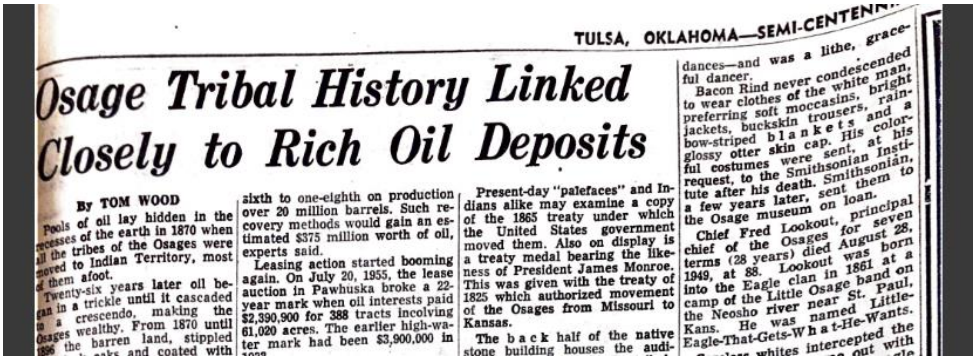
Everyone in my family, myself included, is very interested in history, both of our family and of our home, so the fact that something like the Semi-Centennial events, that the ephemera made seem like a huge deal in the state at the time, were not even on their radar was a shock. This was one of the first clues that I had that the events were not widely known about. However, when I was there doing my research, my father's father, a man who loves Oklahoma and participates in local government as a way to show that love and give back to his community, asked me if I had read the book, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth*

*of the FBI*. I am a lifelong lover of true crime, and since I had not read it nor was I familiar with the story, I was excited to give it a look.

According to author, David Grann's website:

> In the 1920s, the richest people per capita in the world were members of the Osage Indian nation in Oklahoma. After oil was discovered beneath their land, they rode in chauffeured automobiles, built mansions, and sent their children to study in Europe.
>
> Then, one by one, the Osage began to be killed off. The family of an Osage woman, Mollie Burkhart, became a prime target. Her relatives were shot and poisoned. And it was just the beginning, as more and more members of the tribe began to die under mysterious circumstances.
>
> In this last remnant of the Wild West—where oilmen like J. P. Getty made their fortunes and where desperadoes like Al Spencer, the "Phantom Terror," roamed—many of those who dared to investigate the killings were themselves murdered. As the death toll climbed to more than twenty-four, the FBI took up the case. (*Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*)

After I read the book flap, I was stunned. I had seen an article about the Osage and the money the tribal members had gotten from the oil under their removal land in the archives.



TULSA, OKLAHOMA—SEMI-CENTENN

# Osage Tribal History Linked Closely to Rich Oil Deposits

By TOM WOOD

Pools of oil lay hidden in the recesses of the earth in 1870 when all the tribes of the Osages were moved to Indian Territory, most of them afoot.

Twenty-six years later oil began in a trickle until it cascaded to a crescendo, making the Osages wealthy. From 1870 until 1896 the barren land, stippled [illegible] and coated with

sixth to one-eighth on production over 20 million barrels. Such recovery methods would gain an estimated $375 million worth of oil, experts said.

Leasing action started booming again. On July 20, 1955, the lease auction in Pawhuska broke a 22-year mark when oil interests paid $2,390,900 for 388 tracts incolving 61,020 acres. The earlier high-water mark had been $3,900,000 in

Present-day "palefaces" and Indians alike may examine a copy of the 1865 treaty under which the United States government moved them. Also on display is a treaty medal bearing the likeness of President James Monroe. This was given with the treaty of 1825 which authorized movement of the Osages from Missouri to Kansas.

The back half of the native stone building houses the audi-

dances—and was a lithe, graceful dancer.

Bacon Rind never condescended to wear clothes of the white man, preferring soft moccasins, bright jackets, buckskin trousers, rainbow-striped blankets and a glossy otter skin cap. His colorful costumes were sent, at his request, to the Smithsonian Institute after his death. Smithsonian, a few years later, sent them to the Osage museum on loan.

Chief Fred Lookout, principal chief of the Osages for seven terms (28 years) died August 28, 1949, at 88. Lookout was born into the Eagle clan in 1861 at a camp of the Little Osage band on the Neosho river near St. Paul, Kans. He was named Little-Eagle-That-Gets-What-He-Wants. Eagle whites intercepted the

*Figure 35 Newspaper Article Clipping from the Special Edition of the May 20th, 1957 Tulsa Tribune. Title text reads: Osage history Linked Closely to Rich Oil Deposits. 21 Jan 2019 Tulsa Historical Society Archives, Tulsa, OK.*

When I was at the Tulsa Historical Society, I found mostly newspaper clippings about the event in the archive, but there was one complete newspaper included in the boxes. In the paper, the May 20th, 1957 Semi-Centennial special edition of the *Tulsa Tribune*, I saw an article titled, "Osage Tribal History Linked Closely to Rich Oil Deposits."

The article described the riches gained by the Osage people when oil was discovered under their land in the late 1800s. According to the article, "By the mid-20s the Osages known as the world's wealthiest Indians. The Great White Father, so frequently accused of hornswoggling the Indian, became guardians of the mineral rights" (*Tulsa Tribune).* The article goes on to cover the scramble for guardianship of the oil and the wealth associated with it through to the time of writing; however, there is no mention of the killings. No mentions of the dozens of people who were murdered for the rights to their land that *Killers of the Flower Moon* covered. Here again, I saw the history of violence in Oklahoma erased from the histories told at the Semi-Centennial, but I also saw, through the existence of the book, signs that that kind of erasure is beginning to peel back. The story of the Osage killings had a chance to be told, and the story is continuing with the 2021 release of a movie version of the book, directed by Martin Scorsese and staring A-List actors. Finally, another piece of the story to be shared.

Another sinister Oklahoma story that has recently had a moment, had it in an even more surprising spotlight, the 2019 HBO series, *Watchmen*, based on the comic of the same name by Alan Moore. Set in a fictionalized version of contemporary Tulsa, Oklahoma, the *Watchmen* series opens with a depiction of the 1921 Tulsa Black Wall Street massacre, sometimes called the Tulsa Race Riot. As a former Tulsan, I was familiar with the violence, but, much like the Trail of Tears, it was not something that was taught in school. However, since I was living in Michigan when the show premiered, I found myself having several conversations about the opening scene with folks here who were unfamiliar with what had happened almost a century ago.


*Figure 36 Image from Black Wallstreet Times. Text reads: Watchmen 1921 Tulsa featuring an image of actress Regina King, a Black woman with a painted on mask and hooded top in front of a yellow clock face and a photograph of street violence during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Image from https://theblackwallsttimes.com/2019/10/22/how-the-watchmen-educates-america-on-the-1921-tulsa-race-massacre/*

In this apparently widespread unfamiliarity with the violence, the circulation and recognition of a period that destroyed and claimed so many lives, it took an HBO series to get folks talking about it. Tulsan and founder of the Black Wall Street Times, Nehemiah D. Frank, discusses the ways in which the media can act as a conduit for forgotten or suppressed histories

to a wider public, saying, “The entertainment and media world definitely has an obligation to inform America when government-funded institutions, such as publicly funded schools, drop the ball on the need for spreading factual knowledge about American history.” He immediately, however, follows this up with his understanding of the public memory of the massacre among black Tulsans, saying, “Black Americans, however, understand that the White created Christian America nation they dwell within would rather keep its dirty little secrets deeply hidden beneath the aging and soiling rug for as long as possible. After all, no one wants to broadcast their imperfections” (*How the Watchmen Educates America on the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre*). In my personal experience, Tulsa history has largely avoided talking about this darkest part of its past, but there are signs that that erasure is beginning to change.

*Figure 37 Arial photograph of widespread destruction caused during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre featuring buildings burned to the ground. Smoke still rises in the background as people mill about in the destruction. Image from https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/10/08/tulsa-searches-mass-graves-race-massacre-that-left-hundreds-black-people-dead/*

As I mentioned, the Race Massacre was not taught when I was in school in Oklahoma. A *Washington Post* article discusses the way the series brought the massacre to light after it had been suppressed, saying, “For nearly 100 years, the truth of what happened in Tulsa was kept out of textbooks and only whispered about among survivors. “Watchmen” will be the first time

many people will learn about the rampage" (Brown). This reality that many viewers to the show were unaware that the massacre happened is a prime example of the narrative power of controlling a history. If no one knows this travesty happened, there is no need to address it or even to deal with the survivors that still live in Tulsa, no need to have to explain to them why it happened to them, their community, and their homes.

**The Future of this Research**

Seeing the continuation of many of the same handlings of Oklahoma history and the ways Oklahoma is being framed for tourism on the *TravelOK* website, and the space that is being created in popular culture media for a more complete version of history with the production and distribution of Oklahoma's past through major Hollywood studio projects, presents me with a way to bring this dissertation project into its next incarnation. The story of the Semi-Centennial is one that I had to hunt for. The events seem to have been forgotten by even the most enthusiastic of Okies, and so going forth from here, I see a space for an increase in the circulation of the Oklahoma story of the Semi-Centennial. The community memory for events like the Osage killings or the Black Wallstreet massacre have not been forgotten; in fact, I learned about the riots in Tulsa from an African American friend as a teen. It was never taught to me in school, even in my Oklahoma history class. It wasn't until I moved the 80 miles away to Tulsa and got to know community members there that I was told that story.

Therefore, for the future of this project, I would like to compose a manuscript about the Semi-Centennial that brings back into circulation the story of these events and the ways in which Oklahoma viewed its progress and history during the era and the ways those same traditions have, in many ways, persisted. Further, I have spoken to a Tulsa artist about the materials that I scanned in the archives in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, and she has expressed interest in co-

creating a hung gallery show in her studio space on historic Rt 66 in Tulsa as a part of the revitalization of Rt 66 taking place in the city. The show would feature the images and stories I collected along with paintings and photographs of the locations as they exist today. This project will act as a way to show the ways that the images of the Semi-Centennial juxtaposed against the ways the locations have or have not changed in the over 50 years since the events.

In final reflection, it is more than likely that I will never live in Oklahoma again, but my entire family lives there, so there is an ongoing reason for me to return to my home and my home communities. Since I have left the state, I am able to look back at my relationship with it and the ways that the red dirt of Oklahoma raised me as a semi-feral child, running wild with my friends across the plains. The Oklahoma that I left behind is changing, even if it is still holding on to the last dying gasps of the Wild West. I can only hope that the changes that Oklahoma and its residents make are positive ones, and that more and more chapters of the history of the state come forward to be shared as spaces for them continue to be made and people continue to search for and gather their own Oklahoma stories.

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