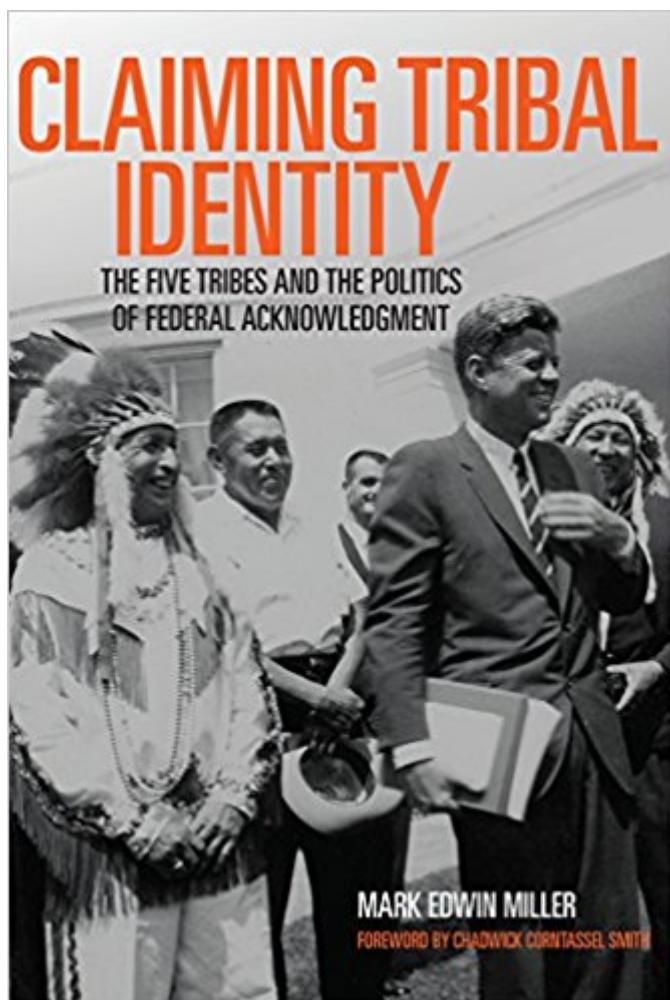


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Claiming Tribal Identity: The Five Tribes And The Politics Of Federal Acknowledgment



Synopsis

Who counts as an American Indian? Which groups qualify as Indian tribes? These questions have become increasingly complex in the past several decades, and federal legislation and the rise of tribal-owned casinos have raised the stakes in the ongoing debate. In this revealing study, historian Mark Edwin Miller describes how and why dozens of previously unrecognized tribal groups in the southeastern states have sought, and sometimes won, recognition, often to the dismay of the Five Tribes—*the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles*. Miller explains how politics, economics, and such slippery issues as tribal and racial identity drive the conflicts between federally recognized tribal entities like the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and other groups such as the Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy that also seek sovereignty. Battles over which groups can claim authentic Indian identity are fought both within the Bureau of Indian Affairs—*the Federal Acknowledgment Process* and in Atlanta, Montgomery, and other capitals where legislators grant state recognition to Indian-identifying enclaves without consulting federally recognized tribes with similar names. Miller’s analysis recognizes the arguments on all sides—*both the scholars and activists who see tribal affiliation as an individual choice, and the tribal governments that view unrecognized tribes as fraudulent*. Groups such as the Lumbees, the Lower Muscogee Creeks, and the Mowa Choctaws, inspired by the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty, have evolved in surprising ways, as have traditional tribal governments. Describing the significance of casino gambling, the leader of one unrecognized group said, “It’s no longer a matter of red; it’s a matter of green.” Either a positive or a negative development, depending on who is telling the story, the casinos’ economic impact has clouded what were previously issues purely of law, ethics, and justice. Drawing on both documents and personal interviews, Miller unravels the tangled politics of Indian identity and sovereignty. His lively, clearly argued book will be vital reading for tribal leaders, policy makers, and scholars.

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Customer Reviews

“Claiming Tribal Identity is a highly successful, and very brave, effort by Mark Miller to explain why the Five Tribes of Oklahoma support the controversial Bureau of Indian Affairs Federal Acknowledgment Process . . . Mark Miller is the right one for this task.” He is an historian with a strong earlier book, and now he has zeroed in on the problem of false claims. Miller’s work is an exceptional history of U.S. public policy generally and the internal politics surrounding Indian issues more specifically.

• Bruce Ganville Miller, *New Mexico Historical Review*

“This is a refreshing look at the intricate politics not just of federal acknowledgment of unrecognized tribes (in the Southeast, primarily), but of the process of negotiating identity within group . . . Engaging, enlightening, and provocative, this is bound to become canonical in this field . . . Essential.”

• C.R. Kasee, *Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries*

“[Miller] has established himself as perhaps the leading authority on the complicated, sometimes flawed, and often politicized federal acknowledgment system” this important and timely book deserves a wide audience.

• Thomas Cowger, *Western Historical Quarterly*

“Miller’s forthright venture into this contested terrain provides much-needed insight into the many competing motivations that undergird these debates.” His book is essential reading not only for scholars of Native America but also for anyone interested in southern identity politics.

• Mikaela H. Adams, *The Journal of Southern History*

Mark Edwin Miller, Department Chair and Professor of History in the Department of History, Sociology, and Anthropology at Southern Utah University, Cedar City, has published articles on race and ethnicity and on indigenous identity and politics in the *Journal of Arizona History*, *Journal of Mormon History*, and *Journal of the Southwest*. He has contributed a chapter in the forthcoming textbook *Utah History* and has been quoted in the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other publications. He is author of *Forgotten Tribes: Unrecognized Indians and the Federal Acknowledgment Process*. He and his wife, Gia, have three children, Delaney, Regan,

and Gage. Chad Smith was Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation from 1999 to 2011 and helped to grow the nation's assets from \$150 million to \$1.2 billion, increased healthcare services, created 6,000 jobs, and dramatically advanced education, language, and cultural preservation. He is now running his own consulting business. Smith holds a J.D. from the University of Tulsa and an M.B.A. from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

I bought the book and read it. I am a member of the MOWA Choctaw Tribe. Here's what I think. I like his objective point of view and it gave me some perspectives to be more aware of for both positions while doing my own research. With that said, I do appreciate his work. Here's some of my findings: 1. The Alabama Indian Tribes were classified as Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, Chickasaw, etc. according to a European standards and classifications. The reality of the era was a different aroma. In fact, there were many tribes and they were mostly familial and the ability of one person or family to join with another community, tribe, clan, etc. was mostly transparent to the Native Americans, especially in the light of the genocide of the times conducted by Jackson. 2. The BIA/BAR discounted Cecile Weathers as not being the same person referred to by the Children of Dave Weaver when they applied for the Cherokee Rolls, as they were not found to be Cherokee. Fine. The BIA/BAR also determined that the baptism records for Cecile Weathers was not a mis-spelling of the Weatherford name as suggested by Matte, the tribal historian for the MOWA Choctaw. Fine. - Now for the truth of the matter: W. Weathers was listed in the 1810 Census. His family changed the family surname from Weathers to Weathersford, and finally to Weatherford. Whew!!! Further Nancy Fisher (the lady is reported in the newspaper of the times to have been about 15 years and escaped the Ft. Mims Massacre by canoe with a child - Cecile Weathers), was also a concubine of Weathers (Weatherford) and known to have had a child for him as well. This is documented in the 1810 census, the book on William Weatherford, and the book on the Tensaw Country. A good thing I took that trip over to the Ft. Mims re-enactment this month. Who knew! - William Weatherford's niece also submitted to the Cherokee Rolls as a Cherokee, being a daughter of John and a niece of William. It's no wonder the grandchildren of Dave Weaver and Cecile Weatherford imagined themselves Cherokee. - Nancy Fisher is also of Indian descent. It turns out she resides in an area where the Creek Fish Clan were dominant. One of her relatives would have been the chosen representative for the Choctaws led by one Tom Gibson as their own preferred Indian Agent in 1851/2. Also the other Fishers were removed as Indians West. - Tom Gibson, a primary progenitor of the MOWA Choctaw is also known as Eli-Tubbee, and he signed the Treaty of 1830. WE have a document where his name is listed as both and signed by Geo. S. Gaines, the Choctaw Indian

Agent at St. Stephens. - Hardy Reed (a white man - reportedly?) married a Creek woman - They produced at least 3 sons - Dan Reed (Rose Reed), George Reed (married to a Juzan lady - Charles Juzan signed the Treaty of 1830 Dancing Rabbit Creek), and Amos Reed. - Dan Reed's children (8 of 9 or so) married Dave Weaver and Cecile Weaver's children. - One group of Indians marrying another group of Indians. Rose Reed is reported to be Choctaw by her mother Kalioka or Kachioka. Rose is the wife of Dan Reed. - Tom Gibson's daughter Betsey married into the Weaver family/clan and brings in the Choctaw Tribal heritage straight from the Treaty of 1830. - Charles Frazier - A signer of the Treaty of 1830, has a lot of his family residing in the traditional tribal lands of North Mobile County and his grandson or great grandson Odelle Frazier is still alive and kicking today. His family is well married into the Choctaw Tribe. - Robert Cole - He signed the treaty of 1830 too. His son Coleman Cole was a Chief of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma. His grandsons Mark and Peter stayed in Alabama and their children are core to the Mowa Choctaw Tribe. - Charles Juzan - He signed the Treaty of 1830 and his family is still present in the current MOWA Choctaw Tribe. - Alexander Brashears - He signed the Treaty of 1830, The BIA/BAR did credit the MOWA Choctaw with 40 of his ancestors but only from 1904. I guess they missed the fact that Alexander Brashears married Barbara Byrd and her family (Cherokee Bird Clan) also are largely predominate in the MOWA Choctaw Tribe, particularly in Mobile County. - The Laurendines have been in the Mississippi Territory forever, even after some of it became the great State of Alabama, so they are naturally well listed in the Mobile County Public Records, have wills, etc. and of course, are well married into the MOWA Choctaw Tribe. The list goes on...So why exactly are the MOWA Choctaw Tribe trying to prove what has been painfully obvious since before there was even a United States? We are recognized by: 1. The State of Alabama 2. The Federal Housing and Urban Development 3. The Department of War from 1835, when they made for us, the Weaver School, built by Indians, for Indians - Check the Smithsonian - We call our school Calcedeaver today. 4. The ICWA 5. The Act of 1832 6. Wall versus Williams 7. Our Medical Clinics 8. BIA Native American Indian Boarding Schools 9. Federal Native American Medical Clinic 10. BIA - Language Grants 11. The Mississippi Choctaw petitioned the U.S. Government for the Alabama Choctaw (the MOWA Choctaw) from the 1800's till the 1940's. 12. The Poarch Creek Indian Tribe provide various programs for the MOWA Choctaw Tribe 13. The National Congress of American Indians 14. Various inter-tribal marriages 15. The Alabama Indian Council Hmmm.... We are recognized federally, whether the BIA/BAR likes it or not. Our people have continuously been organized and petitioning the U.S. Government ever since the Treaty of 1830. We haven't gone anywhere. Like it or not. We are alive and well...Darby Weavercomblues at yahoo dot com

Great book.

Dr. Miller's treatise *Claiming Tribal Identity: The Five Tribes and the Politics of Federal Acknowledgement* follows up on Miller's 2006, *Forgotten Tribes: Unrecognized Indians and the Federal Acknowledgement Process*. Not only is this work useful to academics as they parse through the challenging and shifting world of tribal identity, but also as very context and history for policy makers and civil servants who are consistently faced with challenges as they consult. Through the historical experiences of the Five Tribes, Dr. Miller presents a history that will be important for scholars of tribal identify, recognition, and sovereignty for years to come. Additionally, local, state, and Federal government entities have an increased need for better understanding of the history of tribal sovereignty and recognition. American Indian Tribes have sovereignty over vast land holdings and have interest and rights to many important natural resources. As the United States moves into the twentieth century, it is increasingly important for the Tribes and their potential partners in the public and private sectors to have a shared understanding of a common history and potentially common destiny. In a partnership driven by this "common story" and respect for sovereignty, significant economic gains can be made for both tribal and partner communities. Lacking in common story, we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. With *Forgotten Tribes*, Dr. Miller introduced us to the politics and history of "unrecognized tribes" and with *Claiming Tribal Identity* he takes us deeper into the intricacies of tribal recognition and identity. Helpful to both academic and policy maker alike, both these books belong on your bookshelf if you work with American Indians. Here's hoping that Dr. Miller will take us on a journey again in the near future.

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