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# To Guard Against Invading Indians: Struggling for Native Community in the Southeast

ZUG. G. STANDING BEAR

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## INTRODUCTION

There has been a resurgence in Native American population and culture in the past two decades. From a probable population of about twelve million people on the North American continent at the arrival of Columbus, native populations declined remarkably, so that, by 1920, the U.S. census estimated less than 250,000 people.<sup>1</sup> The genocidal horrors practiced on native populations by the descendants of invading Europeans from the 1850s through the 1920s made being an "Indian" during those years a humiliating and dangerous experience. Many of those who survived changed their names to Anglo labels, abandoned their religious faiths, and tried to fit in to the society of the conquerors. For generations, people denied their native heritage to their children, as so many European immigrants have done on their arrival on the North American shores.

Some Native Americans who apparently were successful at assimilation wrote of their experiences with painful ambivalence. Ohiyesa, a Santee Dakota who transformed himself from a hunter to a physician, wrote six books from 1902 to 1916. A review of his

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works reveals several permutations in his life, primarily from an acceptance of the social Darwinism so popular at the time of his earliest writings to a deeper appreciation for his native culture and religion as he became critical of the agendas of the dominant society.<sup>2</sup> A contemporary of Ohiyesa, Luther Standing Bear, an Oglala Lakota, appreciated his native culture and wrote prolifically about it; nevertheless, in the closing passages of his 1928 work, he literally begs the white man to “give the Indian a chance” at assimilation.<sup>3</sup> These passages are depressing. Those were sorrowful times for American Indians.

The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 was an attempt to get native tribes in compliance with a standard format the U. S. government could deal with more concretely.<sup>4</sup> However, the IRA also contained provisions for some degree of freedom in the practice of Native American religions. This resulted in at least an iota of self-respect being returned to native peoples in relation to traditional customs. However, it was the so-called Red Power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s—and particularly that first, profound explosion known as the Alcatraz takeover by Indians of All Tribes in 1969—that many, including the author of this article, believe gave a pronounced and crucial boost to the dignity and worth of native culture, rights, and religion. Following their Black predecessors in the civil rights movement, these courageous native activists faced frightening reprisals as they stood up for native rights during the Alcatraz occupation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) takeover, and the second Wounded Knee. Some Wounded Knee participants did hard prison time for their part in that symbolic stand. Leonard Peltier is still doing time.

Several significant new policies and events followed this consciousness-raising activism and can be seen as a product of it. The American Indian Religious Freedom Joint Resolution of 1978 is one example.<sup>5</sup> In the years since then, the U. S. government has seemed far less willing to use force against Native Americans on disputed issues. Camp Yellow Thunder was established in the Black Hills without violent confrontation; and the government hesitated to use force to evict some ten thousand traditional Navajo shepherds in the Big Mountain area of Arizona in the 1970s and 1980s after a land dispute court case was won by the “official” Hopi Tribal Council and its business associates, the Peabody Coal Company and the Mormon Church.

Nowhere on the North American continent has the destruction of Native American cultures been more complete than in the

southeastern United States. Thanks to Andrew Jackson and others, southeastern natives were enslaved and exported, diseased, slaughtered, acculturated (Christianized), or forced to walk to the Oklahoma Territories. This was a holocaust perpetrated against “savages.” To cite one of many examples, Florida State University’s vaunted football team “boosters” designate certain contributors as members of the *Savage Club* or the *Renegade Club*, both of which terms are repulsive to Native Americans. For the last two hundred years—and continuing until today—at the graduation ceremony of the University of Georgia, the Clarke County sheriff, decked out in morning coat, striped trousers, and Homburg, and carrying a sword, has led the procession, to guard against invading Indians (see figure 1).<sup>6</sup> Today many ask, Who invaded whom?

#### THE INFLUENCE OF ALCATRAZ, THE BIA OFFICE BUILDING SEIZURE, AND THE SECOND WOUNDED KNEE

For many Native Americans, the Alcatraz occupation and the activism that followed it by such groups as the American Indian Movement began a roller coaster journey of self-determination and confidence. A few forward-looking thinkers prophesied the coming of Indian activism and, perhaps through their literature, helped it along. Their pioneering writings include *The New Indians* by Stan Steiner<sup>7</sup> and Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *Custer Died for Your Sins*.<sup>8</sup>

As the explosive events of the 1960s unfolded, an avalanche of literature followed. Virtually born with the Alcatraz seizure and also celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1994 is the highly respected *Akwesasne Notes*, the Mohawk Nation newspaper that reports on the struggles of indigenous peoples throughout the world. Although much of the Native American literature that followed Alcatraz was focused on Indian history, inspirational oratories from the past, or personal journeys, several important and fiercely independent works emerged and remain today as significant contributions to Native American philosophy. These include *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions* by John Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes;<sup>9</sup> *Seven Arrows*<sup>10</sup> and *Song of Heyoehkah*<sup>11</sup> by Hyemeyohsts Storm; and Deloria’s *God Is Red*.<sup>12</sup> Storm’s third book *Lightningbolt*,<sup>13</sup> published in April 1994, is a continuation of that remarkable journey of generations he has so eloquently written about in his first two works. This literature is a mainstay in the cultural, philosophical, and moral learning endeavors of the

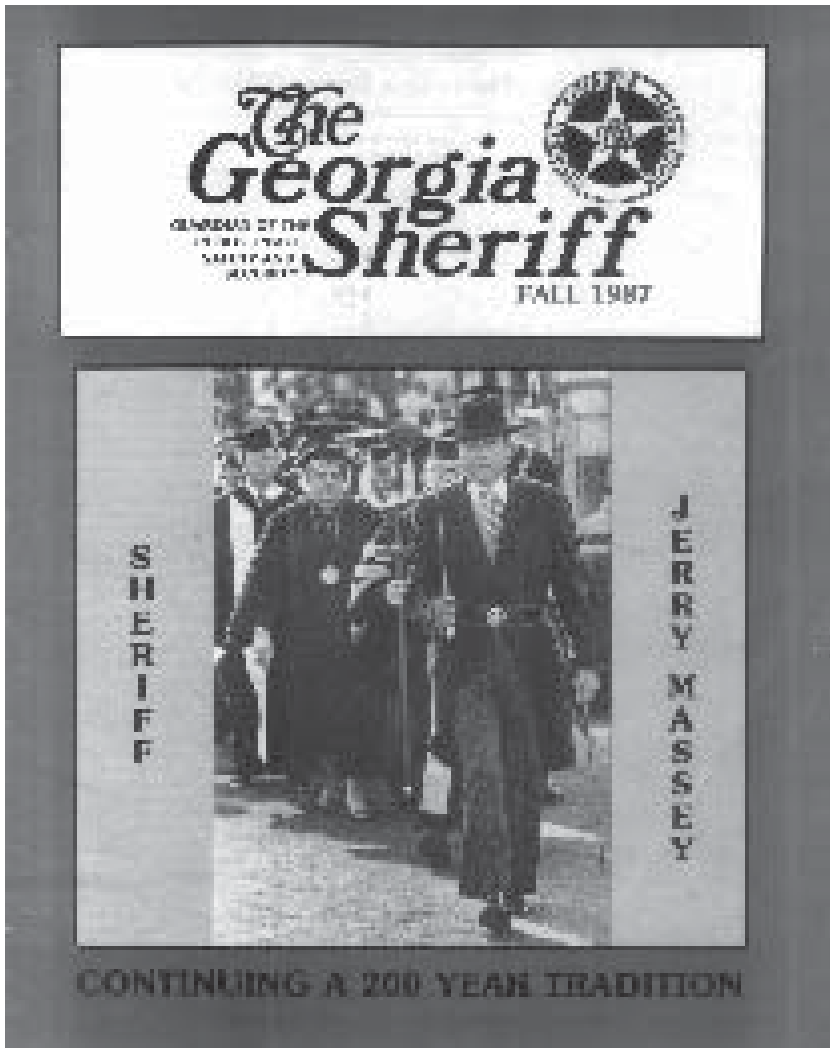


FIGURE 1. The Clarke County sheriff leads the University of Georgia graduation procession, to guard the assemblage against invading Indians. (Photograph by Paul Esland, Athens [Georgia] Banner-Herald. Reprinted with permission).

Deer Clan.<sup>14</sup> Works such as these have clarified and given courage to those who, at times, feel alone facing the bigotry from both outside the Native American community and, unfortunately, within it.

While it cannot be said that the activism of the 1970s was intended, even in a small way, to help those of mixed-blood ancestry regain their native heritage, it has apparently had that effect. For these reasons, the spiritual medicine man of the Deer Clan says of those times,

They got it back for me. They, and especially Russ Means, who does not know this and is probably unaware of the large number of people he has touched, moved me from a cultural and religious wasteland and returned me to balance. They have my gratitude and I pass this on.

Carolyn "Wild Rose" Taylor, a traditional Clan Mother of this same group, remembers vividly those days of activism, the pain she felt in her powerlessness to do anything at the time, and the focus it gave her through the following years:

When those Indians took over Alcatraz, I cried. I wanted to be there! I wanted to be with them! I wanted to stand up for my people, to be a part of this wonderful thing that was happening. But I was a single mom, and I was poor. I could barely feed myself and my family. If I didn't have a family to take care of, I would have figured out a way to go. It would have been a good place to die. I've carried what those brave people did there with me all these years. We are slowly getting back ourselves. But so slowly.

These two accounts are echoed less vividly by other core members of the group. Nearly all of the central members of the Deer Clan credit the Indian activism of the late 1960s and 1970s as the catalyst that started them on their journeys to regain or discover their Native American identity.

## THE DEER CLAN

The Deer Clan of Georgia exemplifies the cultural renewal that has followed in the wake of the Alcatraz occupation and the American Indian activism of the 1970s. The Deer Clan is a rather

feisty unit of a larger Native American cultural association known as the Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy (SECC). The history of the SECC is somewhat vague due to inexact record-keeping; the founder of the group is said to be a man called Rattlesnake Jackson (of Albany, Georgia), and the confederacy allegedly originated in the late 1970s. Apparently, the group appealed to those persons who claimed Native American heritage but who could not prove a bloodline connection to a federally recognized tribe.

### **The Evolution of the Deer Clan**

A number of years ago, several clans (apparently the Georgia equivalent of a tribe) and bands (equivalents of a tribe in states other than Georgia) demanded that Rattlesnake Jackson account for funds. When his accounting was not performed to the group's satisfaction, they seceded, choosing as their leader Chuck "Red Bear" Smith of Florida. Legal battles followed and are still not settled, with each group, the Jackson faction and the Smith faction, claiming legitimacy. The Deer Clan, an organization of more than forty members, decided to follow Smith's confederacy. Smith, in a rather democratic gesture, encouraged the individual bands and clans to incorporate separately as nonprofit organizations. The Deer Clan immediately ran with this idea and almost instantaneously created new bylaws.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, the Deer Clan engaged a "medicine man" as a spiritual advisor. This man, from a tribal affiliation in the northeastern woodlands (Iroquois Confederacy) and heavily influenced by the American Indian activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s—and who counts Russell Means among his heroes—called into question their corporate bylaws. "You people are acting like a bunch of European males, with your 'board of directors' and your 'Robert's rules of order,'" he told them. The medicine man reworked the bylaws and also drafted a charter.

The Deer Clan bylaws, configured to comply with Georgia's nonprofit corporation laws, were approved by vote of the membership. It was an unusual set of rules, combining traditional native organizational forms with state-regulated requirements and organization. The board of directors was replaced with a governing Council of Clan Mothers, which included all female members of the group over age fifty. Two men resigned when they found out. The clan chief, Raymond "Grey Wolf" Lawson,

did not seem optimistic himself, but he breathed a sigh of relief when the women's council reappointed him as chief. As principal clan mother Marjorie "Morning Star" Temples stated, "Grey Wolf is a good representative for this tribe; he is a diplomat and he is a kind and generous man." Those words were good news, since Morning Star, the incorporator of the Deer Clan organization, is known as the most cantankerous and demanding clan mother. However, she is also known as a woman of great generosity. She is probably the most enigmatic of the clan mothers, disliked by many younger members for her intractability, yet revered by older, traditional members for her tenacity, faith, generosity, and love.

### **The Nucleus of Deer Clan Membership**

The new Deer Clan organization, although approved by the membership, was a strange amalgam of rules that caused problems and occasionally role conflicts for members. The Deer Clan held by its new organization, although many did not know how to deal with it. Even today, people call for "motions" and "seconds" in council meetings, although that procedure is no longer a part of the process. The six clan mothers stood strongly together. The rest of the clan and the confederacy may have wavered, but these elder women (all of them grandmothers) stayed the course. They are listed as follows:

Marjorie "Morning Star" Temples, principal clan mother: The diminutive widow of a highly esteemed Georgia Highway Patrol regional commander, she is revered in the police community. She is also revered in the Native American community for her courage and generosity. She never does as she is told, and that is her greatest strength and inspiration.

Vivian "Panther" Lawson, chief, Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy: An artistic and strong woman who lent leadership to American Indian affairs long before most of the present Deer Clan members were involved, Lawson is an apt representative to succeed Red Bear Smith. She is known for her generosity, kindness, and very acute diplomacy.

Virginia A. Red Hawk, clan mother. Red Hawk seldom shows up in Deer Clan proceedings, because she is a touring lecturer in a field she was instrumental in founding: forensic nursing. Currently, she is the first president of the Interna-



tional Association of Forensic Nurses, a group with a membership of more than five hundred. She supports the clan mother government and her friends and associates on the Council of Clan Mothers. She is an example of how one can move beyond local issues and assume a national and even international role, yet still support traditional religion and values.

Carolyn "Wild Rose" Taylor, clan mother: Taylor is the most introspective clan mother, the personification of kindness and caring. She always sees the good in everyone and everything. A few moments with Taylor will cure pain. She has endured much in her life but has always placed care and love at the forefront. Her caring for others is legendary.

Cathy "Wildflower" Searcy, clan mother: Searcy keeps things running. She fills all jobs that nobody else wants. She keeps track of the frog skins (money) and the records. She will not turn over these tasks to those who will not take responsibility. She is described by her fellow tribal members as that flower that grows through cement.

Doris "Snow Bird" Roark, clan mother: Roark is an always-present, helpful, and watchful woman, unafraid of hard work, such as preparing ceremonial grounds. She is always there to do what has to be done.

The Deer Clan has also appointed several other officials, as follows:

Raymond "Grey Wolf" Lawson, chief: Lawson is well respected. He is kind and gentle but also a man of courage and forbearance. An exceptional diplomat, he lends the type of reasonable leadership the clan mothers endorse.

Kompau\*skwe, spiritual medicine man: Kompau\*skwe was a primary advisor to the council on spiritual matters. He confronted the issue of Christianity's incompatibility with Native American spiritual philosophy, whereas Red Bear Smith, the descendant of several (Christian) Methodist ministers, claimed that Indian religious philosophy and Christian religious philosophy were compatible. Kompau\*skwe always disagreed, citing the Christian notion of the superiority of the male over the female, the belief in original sin, and the idea of a devil. He also mentioned the Christians' habit of butchering people with whom they disagreed or whose land they wanted.

Larry "Mountain Lion" Lyons, cultural medicine man: An avid environmentalist, Lyons seems ideally suited to the task. He is invariably industrious in locating local spiritual sites and bringing cultural awareness to the group. He is a

man of the earth and brings that perspective to the group at all times and in all things. The clan mothers regard Lyons as a very valuable member of the clan. Fortunately, Kompau\*skwe and Lyons get along and work with each other well. Speaking of his colleague, Kompau\*skwe said, "Mountain Lion is the most ethical and conscientious person that I know. Praise goes no higher."

The above individuals form the nucleus of the group of Deer Clan members clearly identified as traditionals as well as officials of the organization. Of the more than forty members of the Deer Clan, some are inactive, and others, although active, do not hold clearly recognizable positions in the group. The remainder of this article examines what the Deer Clan is, what it seeks to accomplish in the formation of community, and how it confronts its problems. As will be seen, this examination raises more complex issues than first anticipated and probably more questions than answers.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

### **Blood Proof**

One of the most spirited arguments that arose when the Deer Clan was forming its charter and bylaws was the age-old issue of blood quantum measure. This debate paralleled one that confronted African-Americans during the civil rights movement. In the old South, Blacks were negatively cast, in the blood quantum business, by degree of blackness as quadroons or octoroons, and so on, to prevent them from "passing" as whites. Ironically, this mixed-blood status became even more detrimental to Blacks during the Black Power movement, when lighter-skinned Blacks were regarded as less worthy of the title *brother* or *sister*. The same form of discrimination exists today in Native American circles as "bloods" (full-bloods, or at least the physical appearance of "Indianness") look down upon the "breeds" (half-breeds or other combinations of mixed blood). The Deer Clan's spiritual medicine man, who has lived on four U. S. Indian reservations, recalled that, as a mixed-blood himself, he was readily accepted in the larger American Indian community by the traditional elders but was discriminated against by those young people seeking personal power either within their organizations or in the larger white society.

For the Deer Clan, elaborate systems of proving blood quantum measure were proposed, including the filing of genealogical forms and the requirement to provide family records. Finally, one clan mother (Panther), backed up by the spiritual medicine man, made an eloquent case for dropping blood quantum requirements altogether and adopting other measures of Indian-ness as more valid for the purposes of the Deer Clan. These purposes were identified by the group as "to practice and promote traditional Native American customs, culture, and values for its members and the wider community."<sup>16</sup> The lack of a firm blood quantum requirement immediately brought protests from those who regarded federal recognition as an Indian tribe as a final goal of the organization. However, Deer Clan leadership scuttled the federal recognition notion as an aim of the group. In the words of one clan mother, "We've done perfectly well in our lives up to this point without being on the U. S. government dole, and I see no need to seek federal recognition." In another instance, a Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy (SECC) leader from another clan / band informed Deer Clan members that scholarship money was available in the state, that others were cashing in on it, and that the Deer Clan should get recognition in order to gain access to these funds. One clan mother flared at that suggestion:

Scholarship money for Indians is supposed to be for those disadvantaged kids from reservations and in high unemployment and low educational opportunity areas. Now maybe a Deer Clan kid will come along some day that will qualify for that, and then we'll try to get that kid a scholarship. Although none of us in the Deer Clan is wealthy, we have paid and can pay our own way. We're here to give, not take.

In the end, the approved bylaws for membership stated,

Membership in this Corporation shall be open to all persons of Native American (American Indian) ancestry and / or those persons professing a Native American cultural orientation and who are primarily identified as following a Native American cultural lifestyle in their communities and who agree with the aims and purposes of this Corporation.<sup>17</sup>

In opting for a purely cultural identity rather than a biological one, the Deer Clan leaders realize that their legitimacy may be

questioned by other natives, tribes, and governments. Much discussion and argument was exchanged on this issue, but, in the end, the words expressed by one Deer Clan leader summed it up: "We are not doing this to accommodate others; we are doing it to try to regain the heritage we know is ours and the heritage we prefer, and we are doing it for our children."

### **The Adoption of Individual Traditional Native Names**

One interesting facet of the Deer Clan and many other Native American groups is how names are used by individuals in the group. Although most members proudly proclaim their Native American heritage, all but three members of the Deer Clan have Anglo primary names with traditional Native American names added in quotes or brackets, and many have no traditional Native American names. This is not to say that it is necessary to adopt a traditional native name at all, since many, if not most, natives living on reservations use only Anglo, Franco, or Hispanic names exclusively. However, in the difficult search for cultural identity for a group such as the Deer Clan, it is odd that more members do not seek permanent name changes.

In my interviews with Deer Clan members about names, they provided two reasons for the lack of action in this area. One group simply stated that they did not know how to go about changing their names or were not aware they could do it, usually adding that they did not want to spend hundreds of dollars on a lawyer to get it done. Another group, markedly more vague about the issue, at least implied that they did not want to leave the dominant world behind, which gave at least one member the impression that they were "playing at the Indian thing." This second group, of course, raises issues about "wannabees" and points up the disdain and distrust with which they are regarded by federally recognized American Indian groups, other Native Americans more fully committed to a native cultural role, and federal bureaucrats who deal with American Indian groups. One such bureaucrat, William W. Quinn, Jr., authored an article specifically targeting southeastern Native American groups and their use of inserted Native American names that make little cultural or logical sense.<sup>18</sup>

### WHY IS THERE A DEER CLAN?

Interviews and observations of Deer Clan members reveal a complex set of motivations and rationales for joining the group that are not reflected in the straightforward goals listed in the organization's charter. For the individuals previously named, the agenda for the Deer Clan seems clear: to create and maintain a Native American community and presence in south Georgia that adheres to traditional Native American culture, values, and religion. As it turns out, religion causes the most controversy.

#### **The Religious Controversy**

Southern Georgia is well known for its conservatism and its overwhelmingly fundamentalist Christian orientation; some call it "the buckle of the Bible Belt." This fundamentalist Christian orientation is present in all aspects of life—community, commercial, industrial, educational, governmental, and recreational. Anyone who espouses a Native American religion therefore excites considerable controversy, both inside and outside the Deer Clan. A few examples will serve to illustrate:

One Deer Clan member, one of the few publicly known as a Native American and a follower of traditional Native American religion, recently ran for public office. He was clearly the most qualified candidate in terms of education, experience, and lack of conflict of interest, but he was soundly defeated at the polls. A survey conducted by local university students revealed that the largest single objection to this candidate was that he was not a Christian. The candidate himself reports receiving several telephone calls about his candidacy, the most "helpful" of which came from an elderly man, whose advice is paraphrased as follows:

If you want to get elected to public office in Lowndes County, Georgia, young fella, you got to find Jesus, boy. You can't be foolin' around with none of this Injun hocus-pocus; you got to get you in a church!

The candidate also serves on the boards of directors of several local civic groups. In one exchange, a fellow board member, a woman of intelligence and influence in the community and a

supporter of the candidate for election, expressed amazement when he told her that he had lost the election because of his religion. Her amazement, however, was couched in these terms: "Why, I thought we Christianized all of you people generations ago!"

A high-level official of the Southeastern Cherokee Confederacy, who is not a member of the Deer Clan but visits Deer Clan meetings and functions frequently, prides himself on being the descendent of a "long line" of Methodist ministers. In both speech and writing, he is constantly proclaiming the compatibility between Christianity and native belief systems. These pronouncements have probably caused the largest rift between the Deer Clan and the SECC, as reconfigured after the split from Rattlesnake Jackson. One member of the clan wryly observed,

Well, I suppose this controversy over religious issues is more healthy than our existence when we were with the Jackson group, because back then there was absolutely nothing except paying some guy twenty-five dollars a year.

Deer Clan traditionalists, however, argue strongly against any compatibility between Christian and native religious beliefs. Their traditionalist ideas, as they are trying to reconstruct them, are the direct opposites of Christian tenets such as the "fall" of humankind (original sin), the nature of sin, the promotion of a fear of God, the existence of a devil and a hell, the inferiority of animals and plants to humans, the inferiority of women to men, the notion of an angry and vengeful God, the proselytization of humankind, and the lack of humor in religion. Traditionalists assert that, in the ideal Indian tribe, church is state; religious integrity is the foundation of the tribe. They point to the traditional Hopi as a prime example, although this is hardly the case in most of the other federally recognized U.S. Indian tribes.

The religious issue is far from settled even within the Deer Clan membership. Some enrolled Deer Clan members disagree with the nucleus of traditional Deer Clan members and hold themselves out as Christians. Also, in the southeastern U.S., there are several groups identifying themselves as "Christian Indians" who hold powwows that combine drumming circles and gospel singers. There are, of course, people who argue convincingly that the original American natives lived as truer Christians than the white European professed Christians ever did.<sup>19</sup>

Even among the clan members who are steadfast in developing a uniquely traditional Native American religion for themselves (the job of the spiritual medicine man), their own families are made up primarily of fundamentalist Christians. They are criticized, demeaned, and “prayed for” by these relatives, or they maintain a low profile and pretend that religion is not a part of their native culture.

Flare-ups are inevitable in this atmosphere. In December 1993, one of the Deer Clan members died. He was a traditional and a much-beloved member of the clan. Stricken with muscular dystrophy at age five, he had grown into an introspective, wise, caring, and kind man, although confined to a wheelchair. Both he and his mother (one of the clan mothers) were traditionals, but the majority of their relatives were fundamentalist Baptists. The man wanted a traditional Native American funeral service, but most of his relatives insisted on a Christian service and burial. The result was a compromise, with the Indians having the last word. The Baptist minister had never met the decedent and used the opportunity of the funeral service to deliver a hellfire and brimstone tirade at the assemblage from a pulpit about twelve feet from the two Deer Clan medicine men sitting in the first row. During the Native American portion of the service, the minister sat behind the pulpit, hidden by it and invisible to the rest of the group. The medicine men were faced with a dilemma: either confront the exhortations of the minister as incompatible with native thought or proceed as if the Christian portion of the service had never happened. They decided on the latter course, which turned out to be the best decision; not only were the traditionals pleased with the service, but most of the Christians were as well. At the graveside, the Indians again had the last word. They conducted a pipe ceremony in which each of the clan mothers gave her final respects. All stood in respectful silence, except for one Christian family who turned, walked away, and stood with their backs to the group during the native portion of the service.

The religious issue continues to be the main problem facing efforts at community-building for the Deer Clan. This is understandable, considering the primary religious orientation of most of the population of the southeastern United States. But religion is only part of the challenge facing the descendants of native peoples who attempt to recreate communities and cultures lost over the years.

## Loans and Scholarships

Although, to my knowledge, no one has applied for a loan or scholarship based on membership in the Deer Clan, some members of the group have that goal in mind. The clan mothers and other traditional members of the organization are steadfastly opposed to anyone using the organization to benefit from government programs designed to help “disadvantaged” Native Americans. In the words of the spiritual medicine man,

Those programs are for people such as those on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming where unemployment and poverty are rampant. Comparatively, we are pretty well off here.

The proponents of government benefits for the clan often chastise the traditionals, pointing out that other Indian groups in the southeast that are no worse off than the Deer Clan and that are, as a rule, far less traditional, are benefiting from these programs. The Deer Clan traditionals are not swayed by these contentions, however, and maintain that they will not stoop to what they consider unscrupulous behavior simply because others are engaging in it. This remains an area of tension inside the group.

## Wannabees and Native American Culture

Why do people join the Deer Clan? Several members of the Deer Clan and an even greater number of individuals who asked about membership but decided not to join seem to have sought affiliation with the group because they lacked cultural direction in their lives, they feared being labeled as Black, or they simply thought Indian culture was “neat” (now that we have all seen *Dances with Wolves*). The traditionals look upon this group warily, treating them politely but holding them at arm’s length. The clan mothers have been reluctant to delegate authority, because they are concerned that some clan members lack knowledge of and/or dedication to the traditional culture. Accordingly, one clan mother holds dual positions as record-keeper and resource-keeper, and two medicine positions (the healer and the artist) remain unfilled. The lack of a blood quantum requirement for membership makes



the group particularly vulnerable to persons with personal and/or personality problems who seek membership.

One young man who inquired about membership stated that his reason for wanting to join the group was to prove his Indian background. His mother told some clan traditionals that he did not really know if he had native blood, but that he was concerned that some of his coworkers were calling him Black because of his dark skin. Later, the traditionals told him that he should be proud of his heritage, whether it was Black or native. They pointed out to him that, in this part of the country, probably half the Blacks have some Native American ancestry anyway, since oppressed peoples frequently fraternized, and that many natives have Black ancestry. He never returned.

Another motivation for joining the Deer Clan is personal cultural renewal, but some who inquire lack understanding or commitment. For example, a young couple contacted the spiritual medicine man directly (since he is a visible native presence in the larger community), stating that they wanted to "get their native heritage back." When asked why, they responded that they had Indian ancestors, they were upset with the way Indians were treated, and they wanted to do their part to, again, "get their heritage back." The spiritual medicine man asked them his standard question: "What religion are you?" They answered, "Church of Christ. Why?" The medicine man then asked, "Are you prepared to give up that religion?" The reply was, "Of course not. Why?" Such inquiries are commonplace, but these individuals soon become disillusioned when they run up against the core members of the group, especially the clan mothers, the medicine followers, and the chief.

Many Indian tribes have been "Christianized," including some of those that are federally recognized. Many in the Deer Clan ask, "Can there be such a thing as a Christian Indian?" This issue is the Deer Clan's largest identity problem. The spiritual medicine man summed up the consensus of the clan mothers, the medicine followers, and the chief this way:

When we designed the independent organization for the Deer Clan, we had to face the issue of what we were all about. We have no reservation, no dominant government recognition, and, for the most part, we do not hunt and gather nor live in tipis or wickiups. Lacking those things, was it our intention to be a social club or an explorer troop that hunts arrowheads? No. Our intention was to develop native cul-

ture and community, and, in traditional Indian culture, church is state, and the leadership of the Deer Clan felt that Christianity and other middle-eastern religions were incompatible with the pan-Indian and pantheistic notions the group was trying to construct.

Finally, and perhaps most dangerously, some people join the group to further their quest for personal power. These individuals mostly have personality problems and seek an "Indian background" for asserting their personal will on others. The clan mothers are particularly aware of these seekers and are quick to limit their influence in the group. "Prove yourself," they ask, "and you will be accepted." Most, of course, never get the message and only "prove" that they are seriously lacking in persona and spirit. Instead they try to exercise some form of personal power over others, such as holding themselves out as "warriors" or "medicine people." The clan mothers, the chief, and the medicine people have proved remarkably resilient in relation to these individuals.

### SETBACKS AND INSULTS

A number of challenges face the Deer Clan as it continues on its journey toward community and legitimacy. One challenge is the internal religious conflict. The Deer Clan is constantly urged, by nonmembers and some members, to accept and adopt Christian beliefs as its core values. The traditionals reject this. Instead, they have adopted and are proudly carrying on a Native American spiritual orientation. As one clan mother put it, "It is time you Europeans learned from us!"

Another challenge to the Deer Clan's credibility and survival is strictly external. One of the biggest setbacks experienced by the group was the letter written by Western Cherokee Chief Wilma Mankiller to several state governors, urging them not to recognize Cherokee groups other than hers or the Eastern Cherokee band. This revelation clearly caused intense pain for the clan mothers. For years, since the early 1980s, when Wilma Mankiller was elected chief of the Oklahoma Cherokees, these women had felt intense pride and admiration for a woman they considered their sister. The chief and the medicine men also had extolled Mankiller as a woman of great vision and capability. As one clan mother, well over sixty years of age, lamented, "How can this woman that

we had so much faith in, whom we regarded as an Indian leader, and as a Tsalagi sister, have betrayed us so?" The spiritual medicine man was less complimentary:

Money drives these people, only money. These people, including, disappointingly, Wilma Mankiller, have failed to see the vision of our ancestors. We shall all weep tonight that an American Indian leader has sold out many of those we regarded, in the past, as her people. Ethnic cleansing seems the order of the day, as Ms. Mankiller acts more as a Serb warlord than as a traditional Native American. Let her have her power for today. We have persevered, and we will continue to do so. We will deal with these adversities.

### CONCLUSION

This article has examined one contemporary Native American cultural group that is attempting to create a sense of community and identity in the southeastern United States. The framework of this examination was a qualitative assessment of the members of the group to determine their aims and the factors that have influenced their organization—particularly, the influence of 1970s activism, beginning with the seizure of Alcatraz island.

Native culture groups were not being formed to any significant degree before the 1970s. For many Native American persons and groups, the activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s was a delayed reaction to historical oppression. One need only review census information to note the marked increase in the number of individuals identifying themselves as Native Americans in the two decades since the activism began.

For most Deer Clan members, Native American activism does not seem to be a particularly strong focus in their deliberations as a group. They seem more focused on the problems they currently face as an entity—especially organizational dilemmas, religious conflict, attacks by other Native American groups, and the screening of new members. Still, a few group members, the core traditionals and especially the spiritual medicine man, credit the Native American activism of the 1960s and 1970s as a major component of their inspiration and direction.

Because of the stable and independent nature of its senior women members, the Deer Clan has fashioned a unique organization built by its members from the ground up. A study comparing

and contrasting the Deer Clan with other Native American cultural organizations that have arisen in the last twenty-five years might constitute a substantial contribution to the sociological literature.

## NOTES

1. Stan Steiner, *The New Indians* (New York: Delta Publishing Company, 1968), 322–25.
2. H. David Brumble III, *American Indian Autobiography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 147–64; Ohiyesa (Charles Alexander Eastman), *Indian Boyhood* (1902; Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1922); and idem, *From Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977).
3. Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (1928; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 288.
4. *United States Statutes at Large, 1874–*, 73 Stat. 984 (Public Law 73-576).
5. *Ibid.*, 92 Stat. 469 (Public Law 95-341).
6. Jerry Massey, “Sheriff’s Spotlight,” in *The Georgia Sheriff* (Fall 1987), cover, 4.
7. Steiner, *The New Indians*.
8. Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1969).
9. John Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).
10. Hyemeyohsts Storm, *Seven Arrows* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).
11. Idem, *Song of Heyoehkah* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980).
12. Deloria, *God Is Red* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1973).
13. Storm, *Lighteningbolt* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994).
14. Held in especially high esteem are the works of Storm, particularly *Song of Heyoehkah*, which some claim is the greatest spiritual book ever written. A chronological sequel to *Seven Arrows*, it is written in an unusual way, which causes many readers to abandon the book as too mysterious and symbolic. Reading *Seven Arrows* first helps, but the real secret to understanding *Song of Heyoehkah* is to read the “Little Wolf” chapters first and only then attempt the “Lodge” chapters. There are well over one hundred moral teaching stories in *Song of Heyoehkah*.
15. I am of mixed-blood (Métis) ancestry and have known of the Deer Clan since arriving in Georgia in 1986, but I did not become involved actively with the group until 1992. I have attended many of the Deer Clan’s functions. I have been asked to be a consultant for them and have provided administrative support. I also am the spouse of one of the group’s clan mothers.
16. Marjorie Temples, *Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of the Deer Clan Corporation* (Valdosta, GA: Bearhawk Consulting Group, 1993).

17. Ibid.

18. William W. Quinn, Jr. "The Southeast Syndrome: Notes on Indian Descendant Recruitment Organizations and Their Perceptions of Native American Culture," *American Indian Quarterly* 14(1990): 147-54.

19. For an excellent example of this argument, review the thoughts of Vine Deloria, Sr., in Steiner, *The New Indians*, 105-10.