

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Series Editors' Introduction	xiii
INTRODUCTION	
The Problem of Identity in the Early American Southeast	1
CHAPTER 1	
The Invitation Within	11
CHAPTER 2	
"This Asylum of Liberty"	26
CHAPTER 3	
Kin and Strangers	46
CHAPTER 4	
Parenting and Practice	61
CHAPTER 5	
In Two Worlds	77
CHAPTER 6	
Tustunnuggee Hutkee and the Limits of Dual Identities	96
CHAPTER 7	
The Insistence of Race	114
EPILOGUE	
Race, Clan, and Creek	129
Abbreviations	133
Notes	135
Selected Bibliography	171
Index	187

Introduction

The Problem of Identity in the Early American Southeast

In 1783 a belief in the connection between race, culture, and identity nearly resulted in hostilities between Spanish Floridians and Creek Indians. The problem began in early February, when an English-born and English-speaking man named Andrew Brissert entered the Gulf Coast town of Pensacola hoping to sell two African American slaves. Soon after he and his Creek wife arrived, the trader purchased some coffee, sugar, and hardtack and found a place to spend the night. That evening Brissert's host offered the guests some rum before the married couple fell asleep. The following morning, soon after Brissert awoke, Spanish officials arrested him. His crime was not that of slave trading—for selling African Americans was a legal and common occurrence in the Spanish colony and port town. Nor was he arrested for his drunkenness or for purchasing rum. Brissert's offense was that in being "dressed and painted as an Indian," he broke an ordinance that prohibited men from wearing disguises in the city. The local magistrates arrested him on their "Suspicion of his being a Spy."¹

Brissert's wife and Indian family did not passively watch events transpire. The well-known Creek diplomat and trader Alexander McGillivray voiced his disapproval of the capture of his faithful assistant and tried to get the Spanish officials to explain their actions. Brissert's wife and several members of her clan similarly objected to the arrest, claiming that this was a case of mistaken identity. These initial protests hardly impressed the Spanish officials, who chose to ignore "the supplications and threats of his Tallapoosa Creek wife" and to ship Brissert off to receive punishment in New Orleans "with other English prisoners." This stranger, they claimed, was not a Creek man and definitely not an Indian; he was an English slave trader and spy who cleverly used Indian paints and clothes to conceal his true English identity. After all, when stripped of the elaborate paints and his Native costume, Brissert looked, acted, and sounded like an Englishman.

While Brissert sailed to New Orleans, where he would have been detained until a suitable punishment could be determined, the threats from Fus-hatchee villagers and Wind clan Creeks became more explicit.² They vowed to cut off trade relations and hinted that their warriors might take immediate retribution if the Spaniards did not promptly return Brissert to his home. The seizure of their trusted neighbor, they claimed, was tantamount to a declaration of war.

Commandant of Pensacola Arturo O'Neill took these new threats seriously and shared them with Luis de Unzaga, his superior. After some deliberation O'Neill and Unzaga concluded that they had no choice but to return Brissert to his village. If the Creeks claimed that Brissert was one of their own, the Spaniards were in no position to disagree. Race, culture, and language, they reluctantly conceded, had deceived them.³

Men like Brissert, his Creek children, his Creek wife, and her family form the core of this study. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries hundreds of European American men entered Creek villages, married and cohabitated with Native women, and fathered an unknown number of Creek children.⁴ These European American men often embraced the customs and behaviors of their hosts, at least enough to live relatively inconspicuously, and adhered to the expectations of their new families and communities. In these instances they became known as "Indian countrymen." At the same time, these newcomers to Indian life, at least in the eyes of many European American colonists, did not always blend into their communities. In villages located in what is now Florida, Georgia, and Alabama, many of the early American newcomers recognized their newly obtained Creek obligations even as they held what appeared to be European American economic and social practices. They held and sold African slaves and participated in the annual Green Corn Ceremony. They herded cattle and fenced their lands, while they partook of the ritual black drink and painted their skin. They held positions in European trading firms, even as they catered to the interests of their wives' clans. They spoke English, Spanish, or French while also interpreting it into Muskogee, Alabama, and Hitchiti. Their behavior and appearances defied simple identification. In short, Brissert was not the only resident of the early American South who, at least on occasion, looked, acted, and sounded like both a Creek Indian and a European American colonist.

Brissert's two or three Creek children, much like the offspring of other Indian countrymen and Native mothers, further blurred the distinctions between European American and Creek. In Native villages, where the overwhelming majority of these children lived, the children of Indian countrymen were considered Creeks because they obtained their matrilineal clan and village identities from their mothers, who in nearly all instances were Creek. When these children left their matrilocal homes and traveled into European American society or when European Americans entered their villages, however, their paternal identities and physical appearances often created confusion. Sometimes even more so than their Indian countrymen fathers, these Creeks had ambiguous appearances, participated in all elements of Creek life, and yet still seemed to be Englishmen, Scotsmen, or Spaniards in disguise. As much as they pierced

their ears and noses, shaved their hair according to Native custom, and plucked their beards, they could not and often did not want to cut their ties to European American society. Many spoke English or Spanish, held positions in the region's deerskin trading firms, owned property in colonial society, and had European American wives. In short, Indian countrymen and their Creek children made the disparity between race, culture, and identity rather common in the early American South.

In the two centuries since the Spanish officials arrested Brissert for disguising himself as an Indian, most scholars have continued to rely on race, culture, and language to categorize their subjects. Traditional anthropological fields are devoted to tracing and categorizing people according to their physical, cultural, and linguistic traits, and historians frequently impose similar methods of defining peoples of the past. At times this methodology seems to work, as these often overlapping traits have historically defined the boundaries of many communities. Such a schema, though, cannot be used to understand the multiracial, multiethnic, and nonracial societies of the past. Nor can it effectively deal with instances in which cultures met and overlapped. In these instances the trilogy of race, culture, and language has led scholars to see boundaries and fixed cultures where fluidity reigned.

Even though scholars have long recognized the ethnic diversity within Creek and other Indian communities, the rigid logic of race continues to shape most interpretations of Indian countrymen and their Native children. These individuals exist in the background, if not the core, of every recent book on the southern backcountry and southeastern Indians. These works refer to many of the children of intermarriages, their European American fathers, and their centrality to the region's economy, social structure, culture, and political affairs. Their omnipresence, not surprisingly, has not led to a consensus about their place in Indian society. Instead scholars have split into two opposing interpretive camps.

One group of ethnohistorians points to the problems inherent to racial and cultural hybridity and recognizes that the children of intermarriages were often seen as European American intruders. These scholars emphasize the “disruptive role” that they played in Native communities, declare them to be “double-agent[s]” who helped American “divide and conquer” ambitions, and cleverly demonstrate how they were “cultural breakers” rather than cultural brokers.⁵ Perhaps James Merrell's assessment of Andrew Montour, a child of an Indian–European American intermarriage, best epitomizes this approach. “Trying to be both” Indian and European American, Merrell concluded, “Montour ended up being neither. . . . There was no place in between, there were no words to describe the sort of person he was.”⁶

Other scholars declare that in matrilineal communities the children of Native women were necessarily Natives. These historians contend that the children of intermarriages should be understood entirely within the Indian contexts in which they lived. Theda Perdue, for example, persuasively explains that the children of Native women in southeastern matrilineal societies must be treated as fully Native. Their clan identities and village ties can lead to no other conclusion. Terms such as *mixed-blood* and *half-breed*, which imply racial categories and partial Indianness, betray the ways in which Native peoples determined kinship and identity in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century southeast. Children of mixed parentage took the identity of their mothers. James Taylor Carson similarly counters the idea that the children of intermarriages lived on the fringes of Native communities, even when they seemed to be fully immersed in European American commerce. Belonging, in a southeastern Native society, did not have a racial component or a singular cultural perspective. Even when these children embraced the most “cosmopolitan” attitudes, they did not defy Native custom or become marginal figures. Instead, they came to represent a legitimate, although not the only, Native outlook.⁷

Creeks and Southerners integrates the strengths of these previous studies and illuminates a new way to understand the children of intermarriages, especially those who served as cultural brokers on the early American frontier.⁸ Rather than treating identity as an either-or situation, this book explores how individuals simultaneously obtained and maintained their central roles in both Creek and European American societies. It demonstrates how intermarried individuals and their families bridged the gap between southern and Creek societies with their kinship networks, cultural practices, political power, and economic functions. As long as the interaction between Creeks and European Americans served the needs of both communities, these families found seemingly limitless opportunities on the southern frontier. The result of such interaction is an inclusive understanding of race and identity on the early American frontier.⁹

The experiences of European American husbands and their Creek children were rooted in a historical context, but the rules of kinship that controlled their entrance into Creek society remained remarkably consistent throughout the pre-removal era. As a result *Creeks and Southerners* does not have a strictly chronological structure. Instead the volume contains chronological bookends, with chapter 1 investigating the importance of contact and the creation of the Creek Confederacy in the early eighteenth century and chapter 7 considering the connections between race and forced removal in the early nineteenth century. In between, chapters 2 through 6 explore themes and stages in the lives of Indian countrymen and their Creek children. The book begins by examining

the factors that led European Americans to enter Creek society and the ways in which Creeks incorporated them. It then assesses how Creeks used mutable traits to determine identity and thus allow non-Creek outsiders to become kin and neighbors. Next *Creeks and Southerners* details how the children of Creek–European American intermarriages obtained bicultural skills in the eighteenth century. Then the book explains how these skills and dual identities frequently allowed the children of intermarriage to serve as cultural brokers and to live in two worlds simultaneously. Finally, chapter 6 studies the life of Tustunnuggee Hutkee to detail the limits of biculturalism and dual identities.

Creeks and Southerners avoids the mistakes made by the Spanish magistrates in 1783, men who initially viewed the Creeks as a racially defined community and treated the Creeks as a fluid, multiethnic confederacy. A pan-Indian identity would slowly emerge in the nineteenth century, and race would eventually become an important factor of Native identity in the twentieth century, but this was not the case during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ Throughout the pre-removal era Creeks used a matrilineal system of clans to determine membership in their community, and they occasionally adopted various ethnic outsiders and embraced them as kin. They did not believe themselves to be, nor did they behave as if they were, a part of a biologically connected group called Indians. Brissert, despite the pigment of his skin, the color of his hair, and the place of his birth, lived completely immersed in Creek society. He had Creek children, a Creek wife, and a series of obligations to her clan and the Fus-hatchee village. He, like other immigrants in the Creek villages, learned to look, act, and sound like his neighbors. He painted and tattooed his skin, wore appropriate clothing, accepted the matrilineal kinship structures, and otherwise lived according to Creek custom. Brissert made these changes in his behavior and appearance, even as he participated in the domestic slave trade and worked for the region's largest deerskin trading firm, the Panton, Leslie, and Forbes Company. In this way he could look and act the part of both a Creek and a European American.¹¹

Had Creeks defined themselves in racial and nonmatrilineal terms, Indian countrymen and their Creek children would not have played significant roles in Native communities. That they did testifies to the fact that eighteenth-century Creeks neither understood nor used the language of blood quantum or hybridity. In addition, it demonstrates that they did not turn a blind eye to European American appearances, behavior, or paternity. These biological or racial attributes simply did not determine Creek identities. Similarly, Creeks did not possess a singular or essentialist understanding of Creek culture. Instead they recognized that their boundaries existed in flux, with new peoples and tech-

nologies constantly entering their community. Nothing prevented Creeks from speaking English, herding cattle, owning slaves, having blond hair, or marrying non-Creeks. The boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and between kin and strangers, were not as clear-cut as the Spanish officials who detained Brissert desired and often demanded.

Erasing the racial language and logic from the history of Creek society is not an easy task. In part, interaction with European Americans prevents us from totally removing the concept of race and the importance of paternity from early American Indian history. As the behavior of the Spanish magistrates in 1783 demonstrated, many European Americans behaved as if race and identity were logically connected. Throughout the eighteenth century many European Americans, whether Spanish or English, shared a belief that immutable differences separated humankind into several races. This understanding of human difference, though, was not as clear as even the Brissert case indicates. Diplomatic concerns and the danger of the Spanish losing the Creek trade to the United States certainly contributed to the arrest and then the release of Brissert. O'Neill, who initially supported the arrest, did not consistently believe that race and identity were inevitably connected. Prior to 1783 he voiced his fears that Spanish settlers and soldiers might embrace an Indian lifestyle and family. O'Neill's experience dealing with Brissert, who was an adopted member of Creek society, must have buttressed his anxieties that Europeans could become Indians. A half year after Brissert's arrest, O'Neill urged fellow magistrates to "keep the friendship of . . . Englishmen [who] are married and have Indian children, since in what other fashion can you be assured of the trade and friendship of the Indians."¹² In short, while Creeks did not use race to divide the world into static categories, European Americans such as O'Neill presupposed biological divisions between peoples but accepted the reality that a racial barrier did not permanently prevent European Americans from becoming Indians.

European American views of Indian communities also contained a racial logic, one that necessarily shaped the views and treatment of Indian countrymen and their children. Most European Americans viewed Indian tribes as ancient creations with primordial roots rather than modern social and political entities that connected clans and villages. As a result European Americans frequently struggled to comprehend the migration and incorporation of new peoples into these Native communities. They insisted that African Americans or European Americans who entered Indian villages, unlike Native newcomers, necessarily maintained their racial and therefore premigration identities even if they lived as members of Creek society. Fugitive slaves and white colonists could reside in Creek villages, but European Americans frequently insisted that they

were out of place. Their race, at least in the eye of some onlookers, prevented them from being racially Indian and therefore from truly being Creeks. European Americans similarly misunderstood the children of Indian countrymen. Even as they lived in matrilineal villages, sometimes without the presence of their biological fathers, European Americans often insisted that the background of their fathers mattered. Thus, when paternity was known, they frequently treated the Creek children of Indian countrymen differently than they did other Creek villagers.

The experiences of African Americans among the Creeks contrast sharply with those of European Americans. Southern racism and concerns about slavery made it nearly impossible for most African Americans to take advantage of their biculturalism and serve as cultural intermediaries on the early American frontier. Many African Americans intermarried and became residents of Creek villages, but they could hardly move freely in the American South. Once they found homes in Creek villages, they almost always fought to maintain their anonymity and thus their freedom. Repeated attempts by European Americans to force them back into bondage further convinced most African American refugees to immerse themselves in their new lives. Even the Creek children of African Americans faced restrictions that other Creeks did not. The ethnic backgrounds of African American Creeks closed more doors than they opened. As a result this book primarily deals with the interactions between Creeks and European Americans. Other historians have explored and will continue to explore the fascinating and complex history of African Americans and southeastern Indians.¹³

Unfortunately, men like those Spanish officials who insisted on seeing Briser as an Englishman and Creeks as a racial group wrote most of the primary sources used to study eighteenth-century Creeks. Very few works were written from a nonracial or matrilineal perspective. As a result historians must confront a myriad of misleading terms that pervade the available sources. For example, the terms that eighteenth-century English colonists used to distinguish the children of intermarriages have implications today that counter their original meanings and even confused contemporaries who employed them. Our modern sensibilities often recoil at the racist implications of the terms *half-breed*, *half-Indian*, *half-blood*, and *mixed-blood*. They connote biological attributes, genetic percentages, levels of acculturation, and political loyalties. Furthering the imprecision of these terms, English-speaking eighteenth-century Americans usually used *half-breed* and *mixed-blood* as general terms for individuals of any “mixed” background, whether Indian, African, or European. Context, rather than the terms themselves, determined their precise meaning. Most im-

portantly, and the major reason that these terms are not employed within this text, they prioritize racial and paternal identities, two concepts foreign to the worldview of eighteenth-century Creeks.¹⁴

The non-English terms used to denote racial intermixture in the eighteenth century contain shortcomings of their own. The problems with the term *mestizo* parallel those associated with *half-breed*. To a non-native speaker this term may appear innocuous, but the biological and cultural implications of *mestizo* cannot be ignored. In addition to having class connotations that placed *mestizo* above *Indio* (Indian) and below *blanco* (white man), the term also inferred African mixture and signified Spanish origins and identities. Although Spanish men fathered many Creek children, they did so less frequently than residents from England, Scotland, and the United States. Even in instances where Creeks had Spanish fathers, the term *mestizo* remains imprecise. *Mestizos* traditionally obtained their identities as residents within colonial Spanish society, not as members of an Indian society, where nearly all of these children lived.¹⁵

Some scholars of southeastern Indians use the French term *métis* to refer to the children of intermarriages, but it too has inappropriate connotations for Creek society. The *Métis* were and are an autonomous and recognized ethnic group in Canada. It may not be an offensive term, but when used in the southeast it falsely implies the presence of a distinct, self-conscious culture and community. The children of intermarriages in the southeast, at least in the pre-removal era, did not become conscious of their paternal commonalities or form a cohesive community. Just as importantly, the actual history of the children of intermarriages betrays the explicit meaning of the term *métis*. Rather than a people “in between,” as the term literally means, most of the children of intermarriages lived in only one of their parent’s worlds (Native or colonial). Even those who brokered two worlds normally lived in only one of them.¹⁶

Even the Muskogee language, at least in the eighteenth century, did not provide a term to demarcate the children of intermarriages. The Creek’s matrilineal society, which persisted throughout the pre-removal era, had no need for words that indicated the status of a father. The matrilineal Creeks treated the children of European Americans in the same way that they treated all children. Children with Creek mothers were Creeks, members of a particular village, and members of a clan. Creeks also had various ethnicities, such as Muskogee, Alibamo, and Hitchiti, but matrilineal descent controlled this aspect of identity as well. For most of the pre-removal period, paternity and race had little effect on identity. The children of Creek women were *este mvskoke*, the children of non-Creek women were not.

In short, neither eighteenth-century European Americans nor Creek Indians

created an accurate or extensive vocabulary to label the children of European American men and Creek women. Although there have been some recent attempts to create a scientific vocabulary to account for multiracial people, these efforts have usually resulted in little more than new jargon and ahistorical understandings of the past. As a result this volume does not intend to create a new vocabulary or impose a new one onto the past. In most instances the term *Creek* will be used to identify those individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic heritage, who lived as accepted members of Creek society. Those European American men who were adopted into a clan and the children who were born into their mother's clan are treated just as Creek society treated them at the time, as full members of their Native community.¹⁷

Despite the problematic nature of the primary sources available for the study of pre-removal Creek society, the European American concern for paternity and racial bias actually made the writing of this book possible. As this volume explains, racial assumptions within European American society provided the means for many children of intermarriages to participate in the diplomatic and economic community that connected Creek and European American communities. They became deerskin traders, interpreters, and travel guides, and they participated in treaty negotiations as village chiefs and advisers. These contexts provided the bulk of the sources available for the study of pre-removal Creeks, and therefore a written record of their presence remains. Furthermore, European Americans who encountered the Creek children of intermarriages or Indian countrymen frequently found it necessary to comment on the apparent disconnect between race and identity. As with many human instances, the exceptions to commonly held rules garnered more attention than the assumed rules themselves and those who seemed to adhere to them. As a result eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century documents constantly refer to the presence of Indian countrymen and their Creek children.

This volume, in part because of the biases inherent to the available sources, contains an intentional and perhaps inescapable bias. This book focuses on the minority of the Creek children of intermarriages, the handful of mostly men who became prominent traders, interpreters, diplomats, village chiefs, and warriors. It focuses on the options and opportunities that they received because of their mixed parentage and the competing definitions of identity in the eighteenth century. It demonstrates how European Americans entered Creek society, explains how paternal identities affected the children of Indian countrymen, and then explores how these paternal ties enabled some Creeks to mute their Creek pasts and become European Americans. Clearly these were the exceptions to the rule. Not all children of intermarriages helped mediate

differences between Creeks and European Americans, and most did not become famed leaders in Creek society. The majority lived beyond the prying eyes of the European American observers, hunting rather than trading and speaking Muskogee rather than interpreting it into Spanish or English. Most viewed their maternal uncles as their male role models and turned to their clans in times of crisis. Born into villages and clans, these Creek children grew up and otherwise lived indistinguishably from the rest of their people. In these instances neither paternity nor race mattered.