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## Introduction

In this study I am concerned with two obligations that many Yuchi people feel guide the life of their community today. The first of these is longstanding. Each year Yuchi people reenact a complex series of community ceremonies. These ritual occasions embody a range of meanings and, as collective action, they serve to perpetuate the social order that both holds Yuchi people together as a community and links them in wider relationships with other American Indian peoples. This study describes some of the expressive forms, cultural meanings, and social patterns that make up this annual ceremonial progression.

While the obligation to renew these ceremonies each year is a responsibility that Yuchis have felt since the time of their creation as a people, this study relates secondarily to a newer, but growing, concern in Yuchi community life. In the time that I have known them, the Yuchi people have demonstrated an expanding, passionate interest in documenting their own culture and history. Emblematic of this concern is the emergence of the focus group and other research-focused gatherings as institutions in Yuchi community life. Drawing on one such meeting held during the summer of 1997, I present certain remarks made by Newman Littlebear, a Yuchi ceremonial ground orator, a friend, and a principal consultant for the work reported here. Mr. Littlebear’s observations were delivered to a group of approximately forty Yuchis assembled during the week separating the two major Yuchi calendrical rituals at the Polecat Ceremonial Ground. Not only were these comments directed to the assembled participants, but a video recording of the proceedings was also made by tribal leaders to archive the discussion. The ceremonial site itself provided the backdrop for Mr. Littlebear’s comments.

## 2 Introduction

## TEXT 1

Excerpt from comments on Yuchi history and religion delivered by Newman Littlebear as an introduction to a Yuchi community discussion group meeting held at the Polecat Ceremonial Ground, 16 July 1997.

What history we know about . . .  
about Yuchi people  
it came from the non-Indian  
like writing  
by interviews and stuff.

So.

That has been helpful  
years ago  
by them doing that  
just as things that are taking place today  
like Jason  
and Pam [anthropologist Pamela Wallace]  
and different ones  
in this modern time.

See we're in the modern time  
and it's history also.

It is going to come a time when  
this day is going to be history  
when we may all be gone  
just like those elders are gone before us.

And.

We are trying to keep history moving  
and have an account of it.

And.

Perhaps what we have  
in these works that we're doing  
there may be able to come a time when our . . .

the younger generation  
can refer back  
to something that is useful  
when it comes to this . . .  
this ceremony.

Now if you think . . .  
if you think  
what . . .

Today  
what has the Yuchi got that pertains  
such as this? [*gesturing toward the ceremonial ground*]

Is there anything besides this that  
that our Yuchis have?

I think  
if we just really think, there really isn't . . .  
there isn't nothing.

There isn't nothing [else] that our old elders had.

This is what they, we believe, that they first had.

And we're still trying to . . .  
trying to  
go by it  
and continue on  
with what we've learned in our lifetimes.

That's the way it is and that's the way  
it is supposed to be.

Mr. Littlebear's comments link clearly the two obligations that I am describing – to perpetuate Yuchi ceremonies and create a useful record of their form, meaning, and history. This linkage also combines those themes in a way that Yuchi people feel is very important. For those Yuchi involved in ceremonial ground ritual, those practices are the primary warrant for their assertion of a distinct Yuchi identity.

## 4 Introduction

Although anthropologists and others familiar with Yuchi culture and history have noted and recorded their distinct existence for over one hundred years, the Yuchi constantly face denials of their status as a people. Despite the preservation of their unique language and social order, Yuchi people have been externally constituted as *Creek* for over two hundred years. At the time of removal from the Southeast to Indian Territory in the 1830s, the Yuchi were in political alliance with the towns of the Muskogee (Creek) confederacy, in the area of the present-day states of Georgia and Alabama. Since this period, the governments of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation have politically subsumed the Yuchi. In the eyes of United States federal Indian policy, the Yuchi do not exist. They are Creeks. Added to this lack of federal recognition is unwillingness on the part of the Creek national government to accord any special recognition to the contemporary Yuchi community.

This lack of recognition may seem to relate only to problems of identity, but it has far-reaching practical consequences. As a politically disadvantaged minority within the Creek Nation, the Yuchi do not have access to mechanisms of sovereign government that afford other American Indian groups a minimal ability to protect their interests within the larger national political arena. Federal repatriation law provides one example of that issue. As the federally recognized tribal government delivering services to Yuchi people, the Creek national government is responsible for consulting with federal agencies and other repositories possessing Yuchi archaeological materials covered under the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Despite the fact that the Yuchi have been affiliated with the Creek for only the last two centuries of a much longer history, the Creek possess the right to speak on behalf of Yuchi people in repatriation deliberations. As of 2000, the Creek Nation has not extended any invitations to Yuchi religious leaders or other Yuchi people to participate in these discussions. Under federal law, as an unrecognized tribe, the Yuchi must rely on the courtesy of museums and other institutions to insist on their inclusion in discussions related to repatriation. Without recourse to any formalized tribal government, the Yuchi are not well positioned to foster such independent collaboration. As the Yuchi do not appear on any list of tribal entities prepared by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, museums and other institutions have no way of knowing that there are Yuchi people interested in learning about existing museum collections. The same frustrating story is narrated by Yuchi people in other domains where the lack of standing as a federally recognized tribal government blocks their efforts at community institution building and cultural preservation.

As Mr. Littlebear's observation makes clear, ceremonial ground ritual life is a prominent factor in the maintenance of a distinct Yuchi community. This ex-

plains, in part, the focus of this work. I first met Yuchi people in 1993 during a period in which community members were actively discussing the possibility of obtaining separate federal recognition from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Such recognition was, and is, theoretically possible because of recognition legislation that was developed and implemented in the late 1970s to enable unrecognized Native communities to establish standing as recognized tribes. This recognition process, which has been widely discussed in connection with the petition efforts of the Lumbee (Blu 1980), Poarch Creek (Paredes 1992), and other groups (Brown 1993), requires petitioning groups to prove their identity as Indians on the basis of three criteria – genealogical descent from members of a previously acknowledged Indian community, continuity in distinct community institutions persisting through time, and indications that the petitioning community retains these measures of sociocultural distinctness in the present. While the essentialism of such legal criteria warrants extended treatment (see Clifford 1988; Silverstein 1996), the Yuchi community quite easily meets these standards of proof.

In order to prepare for such a recognition effort, Yuchi community leaders began seeking outside research assistance during the early 1990s. Following what amounted to a job interview with the ceremonial ground chiefs and officers in the spring of 1993, I was given permission to begin research among the Yuchi in the summer of that year. My explicit task was to begin documenting community oral history. In the process I began learning a great deal more, about both the broader contexts that inform Yuchi community life and the present-day institutions that Yuchi people use to organize their social world.

When I returned to Oklahoma in 1995, activity related to seeking federal acknowledgment had subsided. By this time a petition for recognition had been submitted to the BIA by the Yuchi Tribal Organization, a group with whom I had not had any contact. I had been involved in preparing a research report presenting evidence in support of recognition (Foster et al. 1995), but those issues were not explored, as this petition was eventually rejected on procedural grounds. The ceremonial ground leaders with whom I had established relationships had not been in support of this particular request for recognition because they felt that not enough evidence of community support or documentary materials had been assembled. One of the reasons that those leaders have continued to offer support for my ongoing ethnographic work is the hope that someday, once an adequate amount of documentary evidence (as well as community support and infrastructure) is in place, the recognition effort can be resumed on more solid footing.

In the meantime, since returning to Oklahoma in 1995, I have undertaken further fieldwork exploring the forms and meanings of Yuchi community life,

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while simultaneously becoming deeply involved in a range of Yuchi community initiatives. Formal projects to which I have sought to contribute include language revitalization programs, children's Yuchi language classes and summer camps, the now annual Euchee Heritage Days festival, and grant writing for these as well as additional projects. While I have sought to make my presence useful in those and other less formal settings, the Yuchi people have generously incorporated me into the everyday life of their community. I have participated in most Yuchi community gatherings since the spring of 1995, including fourteen Green Corn Ceremonies and most other Yuchi ceremonial ground events. During this period (1993; 1995–2000), I also accompanied Yuchi ceremonial ground delegations on their visits to the ceremonies of other Oklahoma Native communities, including events among the Cherokee, Creek, Shawnee, Seminole, Delaware, Miami, and Ottawa. In addition to ceremonial ground activities, I have participated, to varying degrees, in political meetings, workshops, symposia, garage sales, picnics, powwows, festivals, rodeos, Native American Church meetings, sweatlodge ceremonies, Methodist Church events, and other activities that have involved Yuchi people as organizers or participants. In many cases, organizers recruited me to photograph or videotape the activities. It was in this way that my external identity as ethnographer and my community identity as a non-Yuchi participant began to merge into a relatively natural way of engaging in Yuchi cultural life. The richness of my personal relationships with Yuchi people, and my experience of participating in Yuchi life, are in no way adequately expressed in this work or in anything that I have yet written. Some experiences that Yuchi friends have shared with me remain such powerful and personal memories that they will forever remain unarticulated.

The experience of reciprocal involvement – sometimes formal and practical, sometimes academic, sometimes intimate and personal – has been personally rewarding and has enriched my understandings of contemporary Yuchi life. This pattern is characteristic of much ethnographically framed anthropological and linguistic research in Native North American communities today, but it is also a very Yuchi way of organizing the flow of social life (see Wax 1982). That the Yuchi have been successful in their experiment of taming the personalities and channeling the enthusiasms of the young scholars who have presented themselves to the community in recent years is testimony to their ability and confidence as a people.<sup>1</sup>

Through this varied involvement with Yuchi people, I have been exposed to the full breadth of Yuchi life and belief in all its diversity, although this exposure has, of necessity, been uneven. Full participation in Yuchi ceremonial ground life precluded my active involvement in other settings, such as the two

Yuchi Methodist congregations. Perhaps it is needless to say that, in focusing on contemporary ceremonial ground ritual, this work is not a general ethnography of Yuchi society. There are Yuchi people who know little or nothing about ceremonial ground life. There are Yuchi people for whom participation in the Methodist Church is just as traditional a Yuchi activity as is going to a stomp dance. There are Yuchi people who will disagree with much that I say in this work. This is the nature of social life, Yuchi or otherwise. I have no desire to create a prescriptive account of Yuchi tradition or culture. Among the Yuchi people whom I know, language revitalization, funerals, powwows, politics, Christian worship and service, informal networks of friendship and kinship, and for a few, even social drinking, can all provide social space in which Yuchi identity and culture are organized and expressed. In making this disclaimer, I most importantly want to express my view that such activities are not inherently less traditional than ceremonial ground ritual. As I suggest below, tradition is, in part, a feeling that people form and articulate about the significance of their cultural practices. All of these activities have the capacity to make Yuchi life meaningful and to connect Yuchi people to a significant past.

#### TRADITION

Like many basic concepts in the working lexicon of social science discourse, notions of *tradition* have begun multiplying just as the idea has entered a period of critical reflection and refinement. Some scholars have focused on the ways in which *invented traditions*, such as the ritual surrounding the modern British monarchy, have been used to further the imperial or nationalist aspirations of large, stratified “imagined communities” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Canadine 1983; Anderson 1991). Others have focused on the problems that unreflective use of a notion of tradition derived from western cultural experience has posed for the work of anthropology and related fields (Handler and Linnekin 1984). Foremost among these failures is the static image of changelessness that the label “traditional society” evokes. This is a particular problem when such a vision of tradition is coupled with a dichotomous – before and after – view of contact between western and non-western societies, as if history, movement, and change begin with the entrance of Europeans into local social worlds (Sahlins 1993:5). Related has been the use of tradition as a conceptual ideal-type paired with modernity, as if the experience of modernity precluded any connection to a sense of tradition (Abramson 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992).

An inverse reaction to the dilemmas of these “traditional” uses of tradition is found in a varied body of scholarship that has considered the ways in which understandings of tradition are produced in local communities as cultural

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practices are reified into expressions of identity in the experience of cultural contact. Describing the experience of missionization among the Heiltsuks and other peoples, Michael Harkin writes: “As missionaries present a ‘package’ of their own culture, in explicit contradistinction to the natives’ culture, so the natives begin to think consciously about their own culture and, later, construct a concept of tradition. As culture reaches the higher echelons of consciousness, it becomes both a symbol and an arena for meaningful action” (1997:100–101). This view is compelling and I do think that process of this sort accompany missionization, but I am concerned that here the varieties of modern colonialism are framed as unique culture-contact situations within the context of world history. As Marshall Sahlins notes, “Western peoples have no monopoly on practices of cultural encompassment, nor are they playing with amateurs in the game of ‘constructing the other.’ Every society known to history is a global society, every culture a cosmological order” (1993:5). If this is so, then self-consciousness of culture, conceptualized as tradition, is not inherently the unique by-product of European imperialism. We have no direct way of knowing if the ancient Yuchi articulated a strong sense of their culture as a tradition, but their presence in the complicated, multiethnic, Mississippian world described by prehistoric archaeologists suggests that this is not an unreasonable hypothesis. Differences in culture and social organization observed archaeologically and ethnohistorically suggest that the mutual “othering” of Creek and Yuchi people has precolonial roots. The grammatical segregation of Yuchi and non-Yuchi persons in the Yuchi language provides even clearer evidence of this othering (Linn 1997).

In this work, I postpone a direct focus on the construction of a general, theoretical definition of tradition and instead begin ethnographically by seeking to learn what modern Yuchi people refer to when they talk about Yuchi culture and Yuchi tradition. To do this, I have looked especially at the ways in which tradition is publicly evoked and explicated by Yuchi community leaders in ongoing community life. Particularly helpful in this task has been the notion of *traditionalization* as developed in Richard Bauman’s (1992) work connecting folklore, linguistic anthropology, and related fields. This approach points first to the specific means by which tradition is actualized in public discourse as a context into which particular beliefs and practices are situated. In uncovering the *how* of tradition as a way of talking about culture, a focus on traditionalization provides insights into the nature of authority, cultural reproduction, and the ways in which social life is made meaningful. This ethnographic approach to understanding tradition is especially useful in Native North American contexts. While their cultural and historical circumstances are unique, Yuchi expe-

rience resonates with understandings evident in other American Indian communities where tradition provides a key symbol around which the social work of interpreting the past, present, and future is organized (DeMallie 1988).

If an ethnographic approach to tradition and traditionalization requires a general mandate, then such can be found in Henry Glassie's (1995) essay "Tradition." Not wishing to box in a dynamic and interesting concept, Glassie surveys the meaning of tradition, or its local analogs, in a range of cultural settings. This ongoing enterprise leads him to observe that tradition encompasses a range of concerns in varied proportions in different settings. Focusing on individual creativity, it is both the "means for deriving the future from the past" and "volitional, temporal action" (1995:409). Capturing the concerns of those who focus on colonial experience as the midwife of tradition without reducing the world's peoples to the West and the rest, Glassie notes that "tradition is the result of differences among cultures" (1995:409). As a cultural form itself, "tradition can be identified with the products, whether casual or canonical, of historical action, or as the historical axis within creative acts, or as a style of historical construction peculiar to a culture" (1995:409). Glassie frames tradition both as a kind of symbolic resource and as a social process.<sup>2</sup>

The range of inflections that can be attached to local uses of tradition was also the focus of a widely read essay on tradition by Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin (1984). They explore how their own "ethnographic materials offer a range of representations of tradition, from the most self-conscious to the apparently unconscious, from the obviously reconstructive to those that seem to be naively inherited" (1984:276). Such a processual view provides insight into where to look ethnographically to learn what tradition means in the social life of particular communities. Building on Clifford Geertz's understanding of interpretive anthropology as the search for other people's answers to life's serious questions, the search for the meaning of tradition properly becomes an anthropological project when it is pluralized as the search for meaningful *understandings* of tradition, thereby enlarging the "consultable record of what man has said" (Geertz 1973:30).

#### ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

In its approach to anthropology, this work is a modest contribution to a growing body of work that seeks to combine interpretive methods with a discourse-centered approach to culture. The object in this effort is a balance between two descriptive goals. The first centers on nuanced generalizations about local contexts based on the cumulative experience of the ethnographer who has struggled in a search for meaning in the social life of a particular community (see

Geertz 1973). The second is a detailed examination of the artful ways in which particular moments in this social life – unique encounters and dances, disagreements and feasts – are organized in locally specific ways. This balance has been modeled in the writings of a range of anthropologists, including Ellen Basso (1990:3), Keith Basso (1990), Dell Hymes (1968), Joel Sherzer (1983:15), and others whose work I draw upon directly elsewhere in this study. The integration of these two facets of culture – interactional and subjective – has long been an anthropological concern. Edward Sapir, an intellectual forebear of both interpretive cultural anthropologists and discourse-centered linguistic anthropologists, wrote: “The true locus of culture is in the interactions of specific individuals and, on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each of these individuals may unconsciously abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions” (1985:515).

Although this study is an ethnography of present-day Yuchi ritual and not an ethnohistory of Yuchi community life, an ethnohistorical approach has informed my work. Ethnohistory has become an ever-broadening area of interdisciplinary inquiry, but several concerns at the center of current work in the field are reflected here. Central to my work with Yuchi elders is an interest in the ways in which they narrate their own community and personal histories in public settings. Such a view treats oral history not only as a source for information about the past, but as an important kind of social action in which individuals articulate understandings of culture and identity as well. In this sense, ethnohistory becomes not only the study of history in local settings, but the study of history as a cultural system organized in particular ways like other aspects of culture. The works of Raymond DeMallie (1993), Raymond Fogelson (1989), Ellen Basso (1995), and others provide valuable insight into the forms that such study can take.

Another historical aspect of this work is my attempt to consider Yuchi ritual forms and social processes in light of their past, as understood both by Yuchi people and by previous outside observers. From fragmentary observations of the Yuchi past, such a point of view reveals continuities in Yuchi culture and society observable more clearly in the present. One example, to reappear at various points in my account, concerns the close ties of culture and affinity that bind the Yuchi with their Shawnee neighbors. In light of their history of close association, one that predates Yuchi involvement with the peoples who came to be known as the Creek, the affiliation of Yuchi and Shawnee people in the present can be more richly understood. In this concern with culture through time, I ally myself with the general movement in cultural anthropology to appreciate more fully the historical dimensions of the social and cultural life encountered by ethnographers in the field.

Finally, this study can be seen within its own context of cultural continuity. In many respects it represents an extension of earlier investigations of American Indian social and cultural life generally, and of Yuchi culture and society specifically. More than any of my anthropological predecessors among the Yuchi, I have had the opportunity to experience and participate in the full round of Yuchi community life and to engage in extended discussion and reflection on its meaning with Yuchi ritual leaders. These advantages have enabled me to present a more detailed account of Yuchi practices and beliefs discussed by earlier researchers, while describing aspects of community life that they were unable to witness or investigate. While deviating in this way, I explore here many of the same interests that Frank Speck, Günter Wagner, and W. L. Ballard brought with them to their fieldwork with the Yuchi.

In particular, this study can be seen as an extension of Speck's work among the Native peoples of the Eastern Woodlands. Like Speck, I have tried to combine a sensitivity to the local details of ceremonial life with an interest in comparison, not only in the interest of understanding regional patterns and socio-cultural contacts, but as a resource for ethnography itself. Just as Speck's consultants seemed to cherish the opportunity to work out ethnographic descriptions and ethnological comparisons in dialogue with their collaborator, so too have my Yuchi teachers enjoyed exploring the form and meaning of their own ceremonies in contrast with those of their neighbors. To this dialogue I have brought the cumulative ethnographic record on Woodland ceremonialism, while they have brought not only their experiences of Yuchi ritual life, but their oftentimes-rich knowledge of their present-day neighbors, as well. To learn from Speck (1995), via me, that Indian football (see chapter 5) is played, but played differently, among the Iroquois in Canada is perhaps a fact of greater interest to my Yuchi friends than to contemporary anthropology. As for Speck, such a dialogue on cultural variation is not only a productive way of doing ethnography (see Blankenship 1991), but also a great deal of fun when one's collaborators share an ethnological enthusiasm for it. Playing audiotapes of Iroquois songs or video recordings of Eastern Cherokee dances for Yuchi ritualists has never failed to generate interesting observations. These experiences exploring Yuchi appreciation for cultural difference and commonality resonate with James Boon's idea of cultures as systems of meaningful contrasts whose "ideals and actualities neither simply confirm each other nor revolutionarily conflict with each other; rather, each stands in meaningful contrast to another, consistently" (1982:52).

The interest that contemporary Yuchi people show in the ethnographic record of both their own community and that of other peoples echoes Karl Kroeber's interesting observations on the place of such writings in contemporary

American Indian life. He argues that, in part, the oeuvre of early North American anthropology provided “grounding for the later resurgence of Indian self-awareness and self-assertiveness,” at the same time that the circumstances of its production entailed understandable ambivalence or frustration for some younger Native peoples (1992:14–15). If, at times, my account of Yuchi ritual practices reads like a new work executed in the antique style of Speck and other of Franz Boas’s students, this is only partially an artifact of my own predilections. Literate, curious, and committed to cultural documentation, the classic works on American Indian anthropology, most of all Speck’s own dissertation, *Ethnology of the Yuchi Indians* (1909), have shaped a Yuchi ideal of what ethnography can usefully be.

If Yuchis have a complaint about Speck’s *Ethnology* it is that his synthesis cannot easily be deconstructed so that they can learn which of their ancestors told Speck what particular fact about Yuchi life (cf. Feld 1990:251–53). They would most of all like to be able to reconstruct the genealogies of knowledge that shaped what Speck came to learn about the Yuchi during the summers of 1904 and 1905. Not yet having fully blossomed as an ethnographer, Speck did not yet give full credit to his Yuchi collaborators, as he did in his later works (Fenton 1995:viii), nor did he describe the processes that underlay his work. Through study of Speck’s literary remains, I have been able to reconstitute, for those Yuchis who have been interested, some sense of Speck’s experience. More than curiosity, Yuchi interest in the identity of those who acted as Speck’s consultants derives from a general concern with establishing and recording the provenance of the cultural information and interpretations that he recorded.

Such a concern emerges in the descriptions of oratory and storytelling given below, but it also has implications for how I construct this work. Referring in his comments to earlier works by outsiders, particularly Speck’s *Ethnology*, Mr. Littlebear can only refer to the “old people” who gave interviews and facilitated the work. To be maximally useful to Yuchi people today, ethnographic work should be, in part, an archive of what older people have to say on important subjects.

For these reasons, and in keeping with what I think of as the more humane traditions of American folklore scholarship, I have not disguised (in anthropological fashion) the identities of the Yuchi elders who have worked with me and whose interpretations of Yuchi culture are reflected here. I view the Yuchi elders whom I know as talented, knowledgeable people who go about the business of recreating Yuchi cultural life with seriousness and commitment (see Glassie 1982:xv). Yuchi ritual, oratory, storytelling, and cultural exegesis have artistic qualities, and I respect Yuchi people for their concern that these activities be done well. They deserve proper recognition for their efforts. As the preceding

discussion reveals, the attribution of texts and commentary to real people furthers the Yuchi ideal of ethnography as a consultable documentary record. Yuchis disinterested in (or in disagreement with) what I have to say, as an outsider, about the subjects of this book can at least have recourse to the texts that I have transcribed and presented here.<sup>3</sup> As the Yuchi community is small, all interested Yuchi people today know exactly who worked with me, particularly since much of this “work” took place in public contexts. Pseudonyms would do little good in this local context. Fully connected to the rest of modern North America, obfuscation on my part does not seem to have much value, as there is no way that I can hide the Yuchi. Being hidden is exactly what Yuchi leaders are at present trying to undo.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

This study is composed of two linked parts. Chapters 2–4 present background information on the Yuchi and their ritual tradition. After these introductions, the remainder of this work takes its structure from the seasonal progression of the Yuchi ceremonial cycle.

Chapter 2 provides a general orientation to Yuchi culture and history. An introduction to those Yuchi cultural practices and beliefs that are specific to the ceremonial ground context is given in chapter 3. From these initial orientations, chapter 4 forms a bridge to the remainder of the work by presenting an ethnography of Yuchi ritual oratory. In the remaining chapters, such oratory performances provide an important window on the events of the Yuchi ritual calendar.

Yuchi football, the focus of the first ceremonial ground event of the year, is examined in chapter 5. Chapter 6 examines the stomp dance both from the perspective of social interaction within event performances and from the broader point of view of long-term corporate community interactions.

Three specific ceremonial events form the climax and conclusion of the Yuchi ritual calendar. Chapter 7 describes and interprets the first of these, the Arbor Dance. In this event, the Yuchi communities renew their ceremonial ground sites in preparation for the year’s major event, the annual Green Corn Ceremony. The activities undertaken during Arbor Dance express broader themes of renewal that permeate Yuchi ceremonialism more generally.

The best-known Yuchi ritual is the Green Corn Ceremony that forms the highlight of the ceremonial ground year. Rather than examining this event from the point of view of ritual action, as has been undertaken by W. L. Ballard (1978), chapter 8 examines the sacred narrative traditions that interpret and give meaning to this ceremony.

The Soup Dance, which concludes the modern Yuchi ceremonial cycle, highlights themes of cultural continuity, spirituality, and reciprocity that are important concepts in Yuchi life. The form and meanings of this ceremony are explored in chapter 9. Chapter 10 links these specific events in a concluding consideration of culture, meaning, and tradition in Yuchi ceremonial ground life.