The Question of Assimilation Defined from Cherokee and Euro-American Perspectives.

There is a tendency in American society to venerate the founding fathers. The founding fathers’ portraits have been etched into coins and engraved in mountains. When discussing the founding fathers it is important that we do not whitewash over their faults. For instance, Andrew Jackson is immortalized on the twenty-dollar bill for bringing democracy to the general populace. That is true if the only people considered were Euro-American males. Jackson had a different opinion of Native Americans, as he makes clear in his “Fifth Annual Message”:

Established in the midst of another and a superior race, and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority or seeking to control them, they must necessarily yield to the force of circumstances and ere long disappear.

These words sound cruel to the postmodern and post-imperialistic ear, but these words were not just those of the President; they were felt and expressed by many in power throughout the history of The United States. Nathaniel Taylor, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, said: “if they stand in the way, and as their lawful masters [we can] assign them their status and their tasks, or put them out of their own way and ours by extermination with the sword, starvation, or by any other method” (Prusha 122). These statements could not have been made politically if the majority of voters in the United States did not concur. People who believed the arguments of Jackson and Taylor supported removing all Native Americans to unorganized territory west of the Mississippi aptly called Indian Territory.
Central to the argument for removal was the question of whether Native American tribes could be ‘civilized’ in the presence of Western culture, or if Native Americans were doomed to extinction in the presence of Western culture. The removal question was purposely framed by Euro-Americans not as a question of the morality of moving people for personal gain, but as a question of whether Euro-Americans could ‘civilize’ the ‘savage’ indigenous populations. Proponents of removal, motivated by avarice or ignorance, believed the native people were in a hopeless situation and cited the dwindling number of Northeastern tribes as proof. People who were against the removal believed Native Americans were capable of participating in Western civilization. Participation in Western civilization meant the abandonment of traditional Native American culture and the adoption of Euro-American culture. In the public arena, the crux of both camps’ arguments revolved around the Cherokee Nation. From the earliest contact with Europeans, Europeans set the Cherokee Nation apart from other indigenous nations as one of the “five civilized tribes” as they already had farming practices recognized by Europeans and were quick to adopt cotton clothing.

The civilization question is an extension of the assimilation issue that Cherokee and Euro-American writers were trying to answer. This paper deals with many views from people of both nations throughout the contact period. This paper will discuss how Euro-American writers and Cherokee writers framed the assimilation question and trace how Cherokee writers responded in published papers, short stories, personal letters, and novels from the mid 18th century to the end of the twentieth century. The balance between the two cultures challenged many Cherokee, and the answer to this dilemma changed as time progressed. This paper will discuss how the sometimes dissimilar beliefs
of Skiagunsta, Elias Boudinot, and John Oskison regarding the proper relationship
between Cherokee culture and Euro-American culture culminate in the work of modern
Cherokee poet Awiakta.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Cherokee Nation had begun to debate
how to coexist with Euro-Americans. Assimilation in this early period was being
described by the Cherokee as a reliance on Western goods. Before American
independence, the Cherokee had dealings with the Spanish, French, and English, and it is
in their dealings with Europe that the first documents regarding the Cherokee surface. In
1753, Skiagunsta, a leader of the Lower Towns, presently within the borders of northeast
Georgia and upper South Carolina, makes first mention of the assimilation question:

I am an old man and have a been warrior…and have always told my people to be
well with the English for they cannot expect any supply from anywhere else, nor
can they live independent of the English. What are the red people? The clothes
we wear, we cannot make ourselves, they are made for us. We use their
ammunition with which to kill the dear. We cannot make our guns, they are made
to (sic) us. Every necessary thing in life we must have from the white people.
(Rozema 15)

Skiagunsta made this observation only twenty-three years after the first Anglo-Cherokee
treaty showing the profound affect European technology had on many aspects of
traditional Cherokee society. By this time the majority of the nation had made the change
from animal skin clothing to cotton clothes, and hunting, both for food and the lucrative
fur trade, was primarily done with muskets. More importantly, Skiagunsta describes the
political theater at the time; the Cherokees could not risk war with England because they
did not have the means to continue life as they had become accustomed to it without
British support. The fact that he had to make this speech shows the tension that existed
between members of the Cherokee Nation and the English settlers. Some members of the
nation must have mentioned war with the settlers to give him reason to remind them about their situation. Clearly, Skiagunsta is aware of the problems an over dependency on English goods can create, and his observation about the Cherokee use of western goods, the first step in assimilation, will continue through the generations. As time progressed, the assimilation question became more complicated.

Euro-Americans attempted to frame Native Americans, particularly the Cherokee, as people of a dual nature. They were considered heathens and savages, but also a people whose natural values could be admired. Henry Timberlake, a colonial American officer, lived with the Cherokee for several years, and published a memoir of his time among the Cherokee. He describes the Cherokee people as “savage unacquainted with the laws of war nor nations” but also as people to admire: “here is a lesson to Europe; two Indian chiefs, whom we call barbarians, rivals of power,…yet these have no farther animosity, no family quarrels” (Timberlake 8, 37). Timberlake uses the Cherokee to criticize European culture. He calls the Cherokee savages and belittles their ignorance, but he exploits the noble savage stereotype to show that if these savages can live peacefully with their political enemies why is it that superior Europeans do not. Although the image of the noble savage was not intended to be used as a reason to assimilate Native Americans to white culture, several groups used the idea as a rationale to ‘save’ them from “savagery”. The only two options Euro-Americans believed existed for Native Americans were assimilation into Euro-American civilization, which would allow them to reach their innate nobleness, or extermination by the forces of civilization because of their savagery.
In 1785, The Treaty of Hopewell, the first treaty between the newly formed United States and the Cherokee Nation, was signed. In the talks leading to the signing of the Treaty of Hopewell, the commissioners stated a desire to promote “happiness as is in our power, regardless of any distinction of color, or any difference in our customs, our manners, or any particular situation” (Rozema 77). The commissioners state that there should be a respect for the native culture of the Cherokee, yet the truth is far from this. The term civilization did not have the same definition in this period as it does today. The word’s original definition was “Civilized condition or state; a developed or advanced state of human society; a particular stage or a particular type of this” (Oxford English Dictionary). According to the Euro-American understanding of the term, the Cherokee were not a civilization, only the highest state, i.e. European, was considered civilization.

The Christianization and assimilation of the Cherokee was of paramount importance to Euro-Americans. Several Christian groups set up schools in Cherokee lands to provide a basic white education to young Cherokee boys and girls in order to convert them and teach them English. As a report on the Brainerd mission states: “from what we have seen in this school and neighborhood, we are convinced that the direct way to civilize a heathen people is to Christianize them” (Rozema 123). This report, which was not available to the Cherokees, is indicative of the attitude of Euro-America towards native religions and customs. The efforts of these missions further blurred what assimilation meant, as well as the definition of “Indian”. Catherine Brown, a former student of the Brainerd mission, attests to this new division in a letter: “I am here amongst a wicked set of people and never hear prayers nor any Godly conversation” (Rozema 125). The wicked people she is describing are the old settlers, the Arkansas
Cherokee; Catherine Brown represented a new generation of Cherokees who desired to be assimilated into Euro-American society and related more to it than their Cherokee heritage. Even as assimilated a person as she was, she did not want to leave her homeland: “It is not my wish to go to Arkansas but God only know what is best for me” (Rozema 125). Rejecting removal was one of the beliefs that united almost every Cherokee regardless of their individual opinions on assimilation.

Euro-Americans, who had access to the printing press, were able to express their ideas about United States-Indian relationships in literature. Lydia Maria Child, a progressive New England writer, vividly illustrates the conflicting views Euro-Americans had of Native Americans. In 1824 Child published her first novel Hobomok. The novel is a historical fiction set in the early period of European colonization. The title character, Hobomok, is a Native American who marries Mary Conant, an English woman. Through a series of unfortunate events everyone dear to Mary is taken away from her. In this state, the young Puritan marries Hobomok, and gives birth to his child. Child romanticizes the description of Hobomok by using the noble savage stereotype. Hobomok “was indeed cast in nature’s noblest mold” and his nature was “unwarped by the artifices of civilized life” (Hobomok 36, 121). Despite his noble characteristics, the marriage of a white woman to a traditional Indian is reason enough for her Euro-American community to ostracize her. The only group who accepts the marriage is Hobomok’s tribe. Mary’s cold father bemoans Mary’s marriage: “to have her lie in the bosom of a savage…is hard for a father’s heart to endure” (Hobomok 133). Although this novel is historical fiction, the attitudes of the characters are the same as those of Euro-Americans right before the removal acts. The rebuking of a Native American and
Euro-American marriage is eerily similar to the reaction Cherokee writer Elias Boudinot faced in response to his marriage proposal in Child’s era.

The conclusion of the novel reveals Child’s earliest beliefs on assimilation. *Hobomok* illustrates assimilation can only happen one-way. In the 1620’s, the period of the novel, Europeans were the minority in Northern America, When Mary and Hobomok initially marry, they live in a wigwam. As previously mentioned they are shunned by white society, except by Mary’s closest friend, who herself was labeled promiscuous by the community. The narrator of the novel skips the three years Hobomok and Mary live in Hobomok’s culture for according to the narrator “nothing occurred of any importance” despite the fact that Mary’s child was born (Hobomok 136). Textually there is no evidence that Mary, cut off almost entirely from Euro-Americans, adopts any of Hobomok’s culture, and any assimilation of Mary into Hobomok’s culture is overlooked. Even Mary Rowlandson, who was a Native American captive and not the wife of a Native American, learned of the culture of her captors. Rowlandson’s time living with Native Americans was significantly shorter than the time Mary spends living with Hobomok’s family. Child is implying that the Native American activities are stagnate and unimportant, and that their culture is not worth description. The reader is supposed to feel sympathy for Mary because she is cut off from the civilized world living in a wigwam. However, Child does describe the assimilation of Hobomok. As Mary’s friend Sally comments: “within theses three years he has altered so much, that he seems almost like an Englishman” (Hobomok 137). Child is, perhaps inadvertently, supporting the belief that when there are close bonds between Native Americans and Europeans, Native Americans will quickly assimilate to the point where their nativeness is hardly
recognizable. Child believes that in the presence of superior Euro-American culture Native Americans will assimilate, aspiring to its greatness. The more westernized Hobomok becomes, the easier it is for a white person to accept a Native American and fall in love with him. To further this idea Mary states: “every day I live with that kind, noble hearted creature, the better I love him” (Hobomok 137). Mary only learned to love Hobomok when he started to behave like an Englishman.

As the novel ends, Mary’s original Euro-American lover, Charles, returns after years of tribulations. Upon meeting him, Hobomok decides to give up his wife and child and go west. When her lover Charles returns and Hobomok disappears further into the wilderness, Mary is allowed to remarry in a Christian manner and integrate back into Euro-American civilization. The reader is then given a brief description of the events of young Hobomok: “his father was seldom spoke of; and by degrees his Indian appellation was silently omitted” (Hobomok 150). In a few pages, little Hobomok goes from living in a wigwam to being a Cambridge graduate and forgetting about his real father and his Indian identity. In her novel, Child suggests the solution to Native American dispossession for ‘half-breeds’ like Little Hobomok is to be assimilated and taken away from their traditional homes and to learn of superior white culture. ‘Full bloods’ and traditionalists like Hobomok should run west, remove themselves from Euro-American influence, and disappear far from their traditional homeland. Hobomok’s westward flight out of Euro-American territory is remarkably similar to Indian removal, further connecting the events of Hobomok to Child’s period. The conclusion of the novel details how Little Hobomok assimilates into Euro-American culture to the point where one
cannot distinguish the Indian from the European. His Native American culture and identity have been conquered by Euro-American culture.

In Child’s latter writings, she stands against the Cherokee removal. Despite Child’s views on indigenous culture, she publicly supported the Cherokee in their resistance to removal. In her history book for children, *The First Settlers of New-England: Or, Conquest of Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets - As Related By a Mother to Her Children*, she uses the concluding pages to reflect on the United States’ current dealings with the Cherokee:

It is, in my opinion, decidedly wrong, to speak of the removal, or extinction of the Indians as inevitable; it surely implies that the people of these states have not sufficient virtue or magnanimity to redeem their past offences, by affording the sad remnant, which still exist, succour and protection. I devoutly trust, that our Government will not again pusillanimously compromise with the sordid avaricious Georgians, and bargain their honour and integrity for being allowed to compel, in their own way, the unfortunate Indians to abandon their country, which had been most solemnly guarantied to them and their posterity. The remarks of the Editor of the New York Observer on this subject, are calculated to impress on the minds of our citizens their high responsibility: — "We do not think it possible, that millions of friends of humanity throughout the Union, with the chart of civil and religious liberty in their hands, will keep silence and see oppression progress, and the Cherokees sacrificed to the cupidity of the State of Georgia." (281)

The three native nations mentioned in the title of *The First Settlers* were decimated, and nearly exterminated by Euro-Americans. After explaining this history of Euro-American-Indian relations Child uses the opportunity to bring the lessons of the book to the present, and garner sympathy from the reader towards the Cherokee’s plight. She fights the well-accepted belief that Native Americans are destined to extinction, and like New England educated Cherokee Elias Boudinot, she blames Georgian greed for the assault the Cherokee now face from the United States. Although these liberal statements seem contradictory to Child’s previous work, the underlying rational behind her stance
against removal can be found in this passage from Hobomok: “His long residence with
the white inhabitants of Plymouth had changed his natural fierceness of manner into
haughty, dignified reserved; and even that seemed to soften as his dark expressive eye
rested on Conant’s daughter” (Hobomok 36). Child believed that being near white
people did not lead to the extinction of Indians like pro-removalists claimed. She
concluded that when Indians were faced with white culture they would assimilate to it
naturally, due to its superiority. White culture would figuratively purge the savage from
the Indian, but not kill the Indian. This idea was widely held by pro-Indian groups in this
time. Because of the decision of the Supreme Court in Cherokee Nation v Georgia,
which stated Native Americans were dependents of the Untied States, the option of self-
determination for Indians was not viable.

The Cherokee of the 1820’s were a very different society than the New England
Native American nations Child portrayed in her works. After a hundred years of Euro-
American contact, the traditional Cherokee lifestyle had changed significantly. The
earliest mantra of the United States towards Native Americans was an assumed
responsibility to usher them as best as possible into Euro-American culture. In an effort
to adjust to the policies of the United States, the Cherokee radically changed their way of
life. The Cherokee government was transformed into a republic, and independently
Sequoyah invented a written language for the Cherokee language. He was heralded
universally as a great man. These accomplishments follow the Euro-American definition
of ‘civilization’ and the program the United States had commanded the Cherokee to
follow; however, instead of treating their neighbors with respect, Georgian
representatives needed to “ascertain what white persons had assisted the Cherokees in
forming their constitution” (Perdue 96). The representative asserts that the Cherokee were not intelligent enough to create a constitution without the aid of a Euro-American. The American people who had an interest in Cherokee land were not enthused at the changes in the Cherokee Nation for it would make taking their lands more difficult.

Elias Boudinot, the most prolific Cherokee writer of the pre-removal era, dealt with these accusations through his writings. Like Lydia Child, Boudinot was educated in New England, and possessed principles similar to Child’s. Throughout Boudinot’s life, his stance on assimilation and removal changed. Ultimately, Boudinot became a leading member of the removal party, but his early writings display a hope that Native Americans and Euro-Americans would eventually be united through a similar culture and religion.

In his early writings, Boudinot expresses a desire for a united Christian community. Letters written by Boudinot while he attended secondary school at American Foreign Mission School show an ardent zeal towards the Christian community. In a letter from 1821, Boudinot shows his belief that Native Americans have a place in a unified Christian society where “true religion is planted in the heart of the subject” (Perdue 45). The heart is an object common to all humans, and not just white Europeans. Boudinot uses the word heart to emphasize the universality of the Christian faith for all races—salvation is not based on the color of one’s skin. Boudinot believes his conversion to Christianity and his education “in human knowledge” makes him a member of white civilization (Perdue 43). In a letter dated also from 1821 to a Swedish patron of the school, Boudinot reaffirms his belief that a united Christian community including the indigenous people of North America is possible: “we need the prayers of all Christian people, and we are truly encouraged to think that we are remembered by the Christians of
Europe as well as America” (Perdue 44). Boudinot believes the moral state of the Indian nations is the responsibility of all Christians. The purpose of this letter is to use Boudinot as a fundraiser for the school he attends. Because he excels academically, he is the school’s demonstration of the cultured and assimilated Indian. In the words of the American Board, who ran the school, he represented an Indian “taken from the forest and educated by Christian benevolence” (Perdue 8). He would latter use this experiencing in fundraising while traveling the country to raise money for the Cherokee printing press.

During his courtship of Harriet Gold, a white woman, Boudinot’s opinion changed and he began to believe in the separation of the Cherokee Nation and the United States. When Boudinot was courting Harriet Gold, a physician’s daughter, he experienced the racial discrimination of progressive New England. Boudinot and his future wife were burned in effigy, and their relationship caused the closing of the school he loved. The reaction to his marriage is similar to the prejudicial reaction of New England to Mary’s marriage in Hobomok; as previously mentioned, Mary’s father decried her marriage to Hobomok. The very people who had ‘civilized’ Elias Boudinot rejected him.

Boudinot’s letters from this period show for the first time criticism of Euro-American culture and an acknowledgment and criticism of those who wished to exterminate Native Americans:

Our fathers, too true, did you the injury — but where are they? Their bones now moulder beneath some lonely shed, and the scanty earth which now covers them is now all they can claim: and perhaps even that is cleft in twain by the plough that procures your nourishment. Their possessions were once great—a boundless country…You now live on their ruins! Can you still harbor revenge?...Consider your privileges, and the condition of the Indians, your fellow beings; moreover, remember that they have a lasting claim on your benevolence. (47)
Originally, Boudinot wanted to become a minister to the Cherokee, but this passage shows the political transformation taking place within him. He still is concerned with the moral status of his people, but he takes on several other issues important to the Cherokee. Drawing on the events surrounding his life, Boudinot reminds his reader Native Americans are human beings and not lesser people, only in his estimation, less enlightened in Christ. Boudinot also explains to the reader the moral responsibility of the United States to take care of Native Americans by reminding his readers who initially owned the land Euro-Americans now live on and cultivate. He uses rhetoric to demonstrate the foolishness of those Euro-Americans who believe in extermination as he concedes to their claim to the land. Earlier in the letter, Boudinot reveals his belief, which is similar to Child’s, that civilization and “change would be in this nation if ye but act nobly and justly with them” (Perdue 46). Boudinot shares the progressive view of Euro-Americans like Child who advocate that assimilation is the answer to the ‘Indian question’. This belief explains and justifies his initial opposition to Cherokee removal.

On February 21, 1828, one year before Andrew Jackson’s inauguration, the Cherokee Nation published the first edition of the Cherokee Phoenix, the first paper run by Native Americans. With their own paper, they were able to voice their own opinions on assimilation and the removal independently of Euro-Americans. The Cherokee Nation appointed Boudinot editor of The Cherokee Phoenix. Although the primary goal stated for the Phoenix is the civilizing of the Cherokee, the paper also gave the nation a means to combat the misconceptions and lies being perpetrated against the Cherokee by their enemies, and they intended to use it as such. Native American removal is the rebranding of the Euro-American question regarding whether Native Americans can or should be
assimilated or removed from their land. When first writing for the Phoenix, Boudinot was adamantly against the proposed removal, and continued his work on ‘civilizing’ and assimilating his people. Boudinot opens the very first issue of the paper with this appeal:

In regard to the controversy with Georgia, and the present policy of the General Government, in removing, and concentrating the Indians…which by the way, appears to be gaining strength…our views, as a people, on the subject, have been sadly misrepresented. These views we do not wish to conceal, but are willing that the public should know what we think of this policy, which, in our opinion, if carried into effect, will prove pernicious to us. (93)

The paper reveals the concern the populace of the Cherokee had with the state of Georgia and the federal government on this issue. Cherokee people from across the spectrum of opinions on the assimilation question were united in rejecting the removal. Traditionalists were adamantly against the removal as the land to the west of Cherokee land was associated with death. The more assimilated Christian Cherokees were against the removal because their property and estates that they had built in Southern Euro-American style were in their homeland.

In this tumultuous time, Boudinot tries to assimilate other Cherokee using the printed word, but he presents conflicting ideas on the traditional Cherokee religion. In 1826 in his pamphlet An Address to the Whites, Boudinot tries to encourage white donors, while he defends the Cherokee religion against stereotypes and displays a fondness for the traditional view:

They cannot be called idolaters: for they never worshiped Images: They believed in a Supreme Being, the Creator of all, the God of white, red, and the black man…Their prayers were addressed alone to the Supreme Being, and which if written would fill a large volume, and display much sincerity, beauty and sublimity. (73)
The audience here is entirely white, and he could easily dismiss the traditional Cherokee religion as a blight unto the Lord, or he could remain silent on the matter; instead, Boudinot decides to defend the traditional religion from misunderstanding. He explains that the Cherokee were not polytheistic, but believed in one God. The capitalization of God is also significant for this is usually reserved for the Christian God in writings by Euro-Americans. By capitalizing the various names he gives to God, he is suggesting the original Cherokee God correlates to the Christian God. He also tries to dispel the stereotype that Native American languages were savage and inferior to English by explaining the volume and great value the traditional religion would have if written down. Despite Boudinot’s praise for traditional Cherokee religion, he is a devout Christian talking to Christians. Boudinot uses the past tense when discussing the traditional Cherokee beliefs to suggest Cherokees no longer believe in the old rites. In actuality, the traditionalists far outnumbered the Christian Cherokee in this period.

In contrast to this pamphlet, in the *Cherokee Phoenix* Boudinot displayed an animosity towards traditional beliefs. In an editorial from 1829, he describes the traditional religion as a relic from the past:

If he had visited this Nation *thirty years* ago, and witnessed the practices of the inhabitants in their full extent, his tears would have flowed more freely, and the consideration of their wretchedness would have been without a redeeming thought. …Here were assembled almost every night (we are told, we speak from hearsay for we were born under an age of reformation) men and women, old and young, to dance their *bear dance, buffalo dance, eagle dance*…and when the day appeared, instead of going to their farms, and labouring for the support of their family…the males were seen to leave their houses …to a ball play, or a meeting of a similar nature…. In those days of ignorance and heathenism, prejudices against the customs of whites were inveterate, so much so that white men, who came along the Cherokee, had to throw away their costume and adopt the *leggings*…. The introduction of light and intelligence has struck a mortal blow to the superstitious practices of the Cherokee... (103)
He disassociates his generation from their ancestors. He devalues them from human status to ‘inhabitants’. He also does not call them Cherokee because he is distancing himself and the present Nation from the past traditions. Boudinot believes his generation is figuratively rising from the ashes. He italicizes the names of the traditional dances and the word leggings to encourage the reader to see the ways of past generations of Cherokee as strange.

Although this speech is authored solely by Boudinot, he uses a technique frequently displayed by politicians of speaking for the masses by using the ‘we’ pronoun. This plural pronoun lends additional creditability to this important part of the speech as here he is suggesting a great divide between the Cherokee of the past and the present. Wisely Boudinot states they were born in an era of reformation. This word would have special meaning for his protestant readers, and he is making a connection between the two periods. Despite the fact that Boudinot is attempting to disprove Euro-American stereotypes regarding Cherokee, he shows his belief in many European stereotypes of Native Americans. He believes in the European idea that Native Americans who hunted, warred, and fished were lazy and did not work. He submits to the idea that all European culture is superior to Native American culture. For he asserts it was lunacy for the past generations of Cherokee to ask the then minority Europeans to adopt to their culture. For Boudinot only the Cherokee can learn from European culture; Euro-Americans have nothing to learn from Cherokee culture. The light he refers to is again the Christian God, but unlike his previous claim, he disassociates the Christian God from the traditional Cherokee God. He describes his ancestors not as noble, or elegant people, but as
heathens. Despite his intentions to the contrary, Boudinot further perpetuates the misconceptions Euro-Americans have of the Cherokee and Native Americans as a whole.

Boudinot was not the only Cherokee in this period who believed in Euro-American stereotypes of Indians. In 1831, Boudinot printed a letter from Flying Cloud, a Cherokee, that said of the older generation: “we may not expect the whole truth or impartiality, but sufficient matter of fact may be gleaned..., [about] the eloquence and warlike deeds of our rude and savage, but in many respects noble and lofty minded ancestors” (Rozema 137). Flying Cloud has accepted and is advancing the Euro-American stereotype that Native Americans are liars. This stereotype was so prevalent that in this period Native Americans were not allowed to testify in court. The stereotype of the exaggerating and dishonest Indian was displayed seventy years before when Henry Timberlake wrote he needed to hear news from a white man because “[he] was sensible the Indian [news] was infinitely exaggerated” (Rozema 39). In a period of seventy years, stereotypes of Native Americans had become so prevalent and accepted that some Cherokee believed the stereotypes about themselves. Flying Cloud demonstrates other Euro-American stereotypes in this op-ed letter. Similar to Boudinot, Flying Cloud also believed in the savage and warlike nature of past generations of Cherokee as well as the ‘noble savage’ label sympathetic Euro-Americans gave to certain Native Americans.

This desire to disconnect the present generation from the past generations, and the belief in some Euro-American stereotypes ultimately leads Boudinot to change his opinion on the ultimate assimilation question—removal.

Boudinot was initially against removal because he believed it would damage the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation. Boudinot’s political beliefs were dictated by a
steadfast belief in a culturally assimilated but politically sovereign Cherokee Nation. Boudinot believed in the superiority of Euro-American culture, but he staunchly believed “there is hope for the Indian” as long as “he possesses a national character” (Perdue 105). As stated earlier Boudinot and most people in the period saw the shrinking population and lessening political power of the Northeastern Native American Nations as proof of the ‘disappearing Indian’. Boudinot was concerned with this fear and believed the reason the Northeast tribes were ‘disappearing’ was that their national sovereignty was dissolved by encroaching Euro-Americans who “infring[ed] on their rights—by disorganizing them, and circumscribing their limits” (Perdue 105). The national sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation was of paramount importance. It is this rationale that originally leads Boudinot to be against removal “by removing them beyond the Mississippi…you cut a vital string in their national existence” (Perdue 105). Boudinot realized that removal would be a burden to the Cherokee Nation and would compromise its national identity, and that could lead to the ‘disappearing Indian’ he feared. Unlike the rich Cherokee who were against removal because they would lose their property, or traditionalist who were against removal because they feared the land to the west, Boudinot was afraid for the survival of the Cherokee people. As long as the status quo was maintained, Boudinot believed the Cherokee Nation would survive and prosper as they adopted Euro-American culture. He believed they would “become civilized and happy,” and if they did not, they would “shar[e] the fate of many kindred nations, [and] become extinct (Perdue 78). The perceived threat of extinction motivates Boudinot to drastic measures.

In an effort to claim Cherokee lands, the Georgian government decided to enforce their laws on Cherokee lands and people. This action lead to the landmark case in Native
American rights *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. The Court’s opinion concurred with the Cherokee that “the acts of our government plainly recognize the Cherokee nation as a state, and the Courts are bound by those acts” (Prucha 58). However, the Court further stipulated, “they may more correctly, perhaps, be denominated domestic dependent nations…Their relation to the United States resembles that of a ward of his guardian” (Prucha 59). When the Supreme Court ruled against the Cherokee, Boudinot reasoned the national sovereignty of the Cherokee would be lost if they remained in the East. The Supreme Court’s narrow view of the Constitution voided the national sovereignty of the Cherokee and segregated them as subordinate to the United States for the first time. This was Boudinot’s worst fear because the ruling of the court weakened the Cherokee Nation—the idea that Boudinot cherished the most. Without a national identity, he believed the Cherokee would suffer the same fate as the Northeast nations and Boudinot would do anything to stop this from happening.

In the Supreme Court’s decision Boudinot believed there was a loophole: “they occupy a territory to which we assert a title independent of their will” (Prucha 59). All of the present Cherokee land was included in this territory, but Indian Territory, which was not a state or United States’ Territory would allow, as Boudinot believed, the Cherokee Nation to survive as a sovereign state. Although he was against removal initially, the Cherokee land was not as important to Boudinot as the sovereignty of the Nation. The only way to maintain national sovereignty was to procure a new treaty that would secure their inherent right to self-government. Boudinot believed the Jackson Administration had betrayed the promises of ‘civilization’ former Presidents “tantilz[ed] us [with] when they encouraged us in the pursuit of agriculture and Government” (Perue 108). For
Boudinot, assimilation meant taking the ‘civilization’ of Euro-Americans including their God, but remaining an independent nation. The Supreme Court made that impossible within the state boundary and territory boundary, but if they moved into Indian Territory with a new treaty, Boudinot believed they could secure their right to rule in this new territory. He wanted to do everything to maintain the independence of the nation and secure the survival of the Cherokee as one people even if the price was removal. This reasoning motivated Boudinot to become a member of the treaty party and a signer of the New Echota Treaty.

Elias Boudinot may have believed he was doing what was best for the Nation, but John Russ the principal chief of the Cherokee, whose power was usurped by the Treaty Party, correctly realized the Nation had no reason to believe “the United States will be more just and faithful towards us in the barren prairies of the West…” (Justice 89). The Trail of Tears killed thousands of Cherokee and the provisions promised to the Cherokee were not supplied. The Civil War further strained the Nation as some Cherokee joined the Union and Confederacy. In this era of transition, an entire generation of potential Cherokee authors was lost. In 1899, John Oskison became the first Cherokee author to emerge from Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Educated at Stanford, he spent most of his adult life away from Oklahoma, but his writings deal with life in Indian Territory and the assimilation question.

In Oskison’s essay “Remaining Causes of Indian Discontent,” he states his dissatisfaction with the United States’ policy towards Native Americans. In Oskison’s lifetime the ‘wild west period’ had ended and industrialization started to emerge in the predominantly agriculture-based prairie. Since the amendment to the Dawes Act in 1891,
the Cherokee communal lands were allotted and divided into separate land owned by individuals. Oskison argues that in this environment the United States government must change its policy with Native Americans “to satisfy its wards” (Works 51). Oskison uses the word ‘ward’ to refer to the ruling of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. In his estimation, the government had been trying to deal with Indians in a preallotment way, which gives an individual “no spur to become a producing member of his society” (Works 44). Similar to Boudinot, Oskison accepts that “white civilization [which] surrounds the Indian”, but he realizes Boudinot’s dream of a separate and equal Cherokee Nation has failed (Works 46). Oskison predicts that in the future the “‘white man’s West’ and the Indian’s West [may] merge” (Works 51, 48). In this future Oskison believes the government should not treat Native Americans as wards, but as equals. Native Americans had “accepted in good faith the doctrine that his tribal life must be changed, that he must in every sense become a competitor of the white man” (Works 48).

One of the advantages Oskison sees in being treated equally is irrigation for Native American land. Oskison realizes the government is helping white farmers conquer the arid western land, but Native Americans are forced to work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is “severely handicapped for the task” (Works 46). Oskison argues that if Native Americans are to escape from poverty they have to assimilate to the point of being considered equal by their Euro-American counterparts. This form of equality is not a complete loss of Native American identity, but one that allows Native American children to “be educated, wherever possible, in the same schools with white boys and girls” (Works 48). From Cherokee history, Oskison is aware that Euro-Americans once promised that if his nation practiced agriculture they would be treated as
equals, but during the latter period of the nineteenth century the United States
industrialized and wealth and ‘civilization’ was no longer marked by agriculture but by
business. Capitalism is the future and Oskison does not want his people to be at a
disadvantage, and Cherokee children will need education in this area.

He employs this reasoning in his posthumously published novel *The Singing Bird*. *The Singing Bird* is a novel told through the writings of a New England missionary
among the Cherokee during the period surrounding the Trial of Tears. Early in the novel,
the missionary character Dan reiterates Oskison’s argument about how the Cherokee
must deal with Euro-Americans: “the Cherokee must learn the ways of the whites, and
prepare to meet them as equals at their own game” (Bird 33). This is identical to
Oskison’s statement in “Remaining causes in Indian Discontent” and reveals his early
20th century view that armed resistance is “useless” and a waste of Cherokee life (Works
33). Oskison uses the *Singing Bird* to bolster his opinions by dramatizing them in a
historical novel.

Oskison’s stance on traditional religion is also revealed in a dialogue between
Dan and Ta-ka-to-ka, who relates: “I was never satisfied when our priests told us the sun
went through a hole in the ground and came up through another. Such big holes, I
believed would weaken the earth’s foundation too much” (Bird 37). Oskison projects
his belief that traditional stories may not be of value scientifically, but these stories are
important to the cultural identity of the Cherokee and should be recorded in print to
preserve the knowledge for future generations. The desire to record and print the
traditional ways is illustrated in a conversation between the traditionalist and national
hero Sequoyah and Dan:”[will you print] ‘the old beliefs and the old stories of our
people?’ ‘Yes…They are just as important as our Jesus talk’” (Bird 78-9). Oskison deviates significantly from Boudinot in this regard, as he believes tradition is as important as the Christian ways. When Boudinot spoke of the traditional dances he displayed little regarded for the meaning behind the dances. For Boudinot his lack of knowledge in traditional ways was a sign of the progress he and the Cherokee Nation had made towards Euro-American ‘civilization’. He was proud of his cultural abandonment. By contrast, Oskison refers to several stories of the Cherokee religion in *The Singing Bird*, and by including these stories in his novel, he fulfills the desires of Sequoyah in his novel, and secures traditional stories by printing them for future generations.

The title *The Singing Bird* is taken from a traditional story of the Cherokee. The singing bird in the Cherokee religion refers to a “faithless wife, one who does not bear children,…She sits in a empty nest, and her singing and preening cause the mail birds to fight over her” (Bird 53). In the plot of the novel, Ellen the wife of Dan the missionary is a singing bird. Although she loves her husband, she does not want to be a helpmeet, and in order to anger her husband she has an affair to destroy his reputation. Eventually her restlessness subsides and she becomes a good wife to Dan. As Ellen lives the pattern of the traditional story, Oskison demonstrates the value of the older stories, which apply to the modern world, and not only to Cherokee people, but to Euro-Americans as well. The traditional stories can still teach lessons to people and are instrumental in the plot of his novel.

In the novel Sequoyah, the natural philosopher and staunch Cherokee traditionalist, exemplifies the positive characteristics of the traditionalist. Sequoyah is physically unimpressive: “a short, somewhat stout, shabbily dressed man of fifty, with a
blue-and-white striped shawl turban wound about his thick long hair, already showing grey” (Bird 75). Sequoyah was not a full-blooded Cherokee, but “he was all Cherokee” in the opinion of every Cherokee citizen (Bird 76). Sequoyah’s concern with the Cherokee people is what makes him a Cherokee. Oskison was only one eighth Cherokee, but he too is concerned with the education of his people. The amount of Cherokee blood one has is not the determining factor of how ‘Cherokee’ a person is. Oskison and Sequoyah are considered Cherokee because they identify with the Cherokee and both promote traditional ways and pride in being Cherokee. In the novel, Sequoyah’s appearance and obsession with spreading the Cherokee syllabary causes one of the missionary wives to label him “a crackbrained, untidy old man,” but to the missionary Paul “his obsession had become a light in the darkness to the Cherokees at a time of doubt and distress, a standard around which they could rally their pride of race” (Bird 75). Oskison is two generations removed from Sequoyah, but he still has great reverence for him.

Sequoyah is the best missionary in the novel as he assimilates Dan and Paul into a Cherokee way of thinking. Paul equates the reaction of Cherokee people to Sequoyah to the way “Christ had come long ago to the white people” (Bird 76). This religious allusion makes Sequoyah more than a scholar; it makes him a religious figure. Dan is the first to realize the transcending nature of Sequoyah:

‘I am becoming more and more convinced Sequoyah is the greatest man I shall ever know…He seldom speaks…I ought to deplore the fact that Sequoyah is no nearer to accepting our God than when we first talked to me. But I can no longer think of him as a heathen destined to fail of salvation…He is committed as surely to an ideal, as wholly concentrated to a noble purpose as our Christ was’(Bird 110)
This passage shows that Dan correlates Sequoyah, a heathen by missionary standards, to Christ. This also sets up the conflict of interest Dan has as a missionary. If he were able to convert the universally accepted Sequoyah, he would be able to convert many Cherokees, but not only has he failed to Christianize him, he respects him to the point where he believes him to be Christ-like. Eventually Paul, one of the missionaries in the novel, who never followed Sequoyah as closely as Dan, realizes that “since coming to know [Sequoyah] that a purpose even greater than his passion for teaching and for a reunion in peace of all the tribe dominates him. It is believable that he hopes to restore the faith of the Cherokees in their old god” (Bird 153). Instead of being hostile to this plan, Paul and Dan’s admiration for Sequoyah leads them to embark with him on a trip to Mexico. The purpose of this trip Paul suspects is to find the “sacred symbols of the Cherokee” (Bird 149). Most missionaries would consider these sacred pre-Christian symbols blasphemic, and most would try to dissuade people from searching for them, but Paul and Dan have been transformed in the course of the novel. By the end of the novel, Paul is proud of the fact that he and Dan never tried to “stamp out their reverence for the old beliefs. We have not tried to discredit their god, nor mold them in every thought to our pattern” (Bird 156). This is in stark contrast to their beliefs in the beginning of the novel before meeting Sequoyah: “Dan was right…the Indians must learn our language and adjust themselves to what we called Christian civilization…‘however men twist, travesty, or ignore the teachings of Christ, they will prevail’” (Bird 22). This radical change shows Dan and Paul’s alteration and conversion to a Cherokee perspective. Dan changes his mind on Cherokee culture to the point where he prints the traditional stories along with the New Testament. The missionaries Dan and Paul are by novel’s end more
progressive in their feelings towards Cherokee culture then Boudinot, and they have no Cherokee heritage.

Oskison believes in the value of the traditional Cherokee stories, and by having a Euro-American missionary see the value in Cherokee tradition, he shows the transformation and assimilation of Dan into Cherokee culture. *The Singing Bird* is the story of Dan’s assimilation to the point where he dies with Sequoyah trying to find a mysterious relic from the Cherokee past. Ultimately, Paul and Dan become most concerned not with the conversion of the Cherokee to Christianity, but with the education of the Cherokee children. Oskison believes in Euro-American education for the Cherokee, but he does not advocate for the extinguishment of Cherokee culture as Boudinot does. Sequoyah is the ultimate example of Oskison’s ideal Cherokee, for he possesses a great intelligence and is driven to teach the Cherokee people so they can compete as equals with Euro-Americans.

In *The Singing Bird*, the traditionalist Sequoyah is praised while Boudinot is ridiculed for his decisions as well as his part in the Trail of Tears, revealing Oskison’s feelings towards the treaty party signers:

‘Ever since Jefferson proposed in 1803 to make the Louisiana Purchase a dumping ground for all Indians, Government agents have strive to create factions in the tribes favorable to removal. They petted those who yielded…and promised tem fat rewards—which were seldom paid. Poor Boudinot, for instance, lost everything…Now he has lost his life to me who believed him to be a traitor.’ (114)

In his fictional depiction of the treaty, Oskison blames Boudinot for his trust in the United States government. He thought he was doing what was best for his people, but ended up being killed by the countrymen he was trying to save. The horrors of the Trail
of Tears are not forgotten by Oskison, and he includes some stories of the removal in his novel: “‘They say they are damn tired of roundin’ up the people an’ they stuck gran’ma in the behind till she bleed with the knives on the end of their guns because she could not walk fast’” (Bird 102). The tribulations suffered by the Cherokee, including Oskison’s own family, form his opinions on assimilation. While Boudinot believed in the stereotypes of Euro-Americans so much that he doubted the stories of the older generations, Oskison believes in the values the older generations can give to modern Cherokee in their wisdom and cultural identity. Ironically, the older generations, whom Boudinot believed to be untrustworthy, were the people who had experience in making treaties with the United States. If he had sought out their knowledge, he may have learned to be less trusting of the United States when singing the Treaty of New Echota, and not surrendered all of the Cherokee Nation’s land.

Oskison’s short story “The Problem of Old Harjo” shows a respect for traditional religion and way of life, and questions whether Native Americans should adopt Christianity. In the story, Oskison concerns himself again with missionaries and their interactions with a traditional Native American. Old Harjo is an old Native American, who recently “learned that he was a sinner” from a new missionary (Works 52). The plot of the story revolves around the difficulty with Harjo’s conversion to Christianity, because Harjo has two wives and cannot enter the church. To solve the dilemma the head missionary requires “before he comes into the presence of the Lord” Harjo has to give up one of his wives (Works 52). Throughout the story, Oskison employs dark humor to illuminate the insanity of the requests imposed by Euro-Americans on indigenous nations. Harjo has no conception of his ‘sin’ and did not know that he needed to be saved
until a white missionary told him. Oskison is implying that the sin is in the eye of the beholder and not universal. The young missionary is described as “weak on matters of doctrine” but full of “enthusiasm” and actually asks Harjo to choose which wife to give up. When Harjo is asked to give up one of his wives, he believes it is a joke.

Harjo’s conversation with the missionary demonstrates the disconnect between the traditionalists and Euro-American culture. As Harjo loves both of his wives, he cannot believe someone would ask him to disavow one of them. He and his first wife Lisa agreed to take in Jennie, his second wife, in hopes that he might conceive a child with another wife, but the second marriage did not have any children. The missionary finally realizes their love and shows an understanding of the traditional life: “Forget what I said. Forget that you wanted to join the church” (Works 57). By listening to Harjo’s dilemma the missionary understands his bigamy is not evil.

After spending time with Harjo, the missionary begins to understand Native American culture, as did Dan and Paul in *The Singing Bird*, and becomes less adamant about the conversion of Native Americans: “all of her zeal had been dissipated by a simple statement of the old man” (Works 57). The changing of perspective in missionary characters is used by Oskison to strengthen the movement for Native cultures. Missionaries are commonly associated with being uncompromising in their faith as demonstrated by the head missionary in the story: “the church could not listen to even to a hint of compromise” (Works 58). However, the missionaries who serve as protagonists in Oskison’s works have their opinions on Native cultures changed as a result of their interactions with Native Americans. Unlike Boudinot, Euro-American culture is not the only culture in Oskison’s estimation. The head missionary, however, represented the
stance of the majority of missionaries and her plans for the future of the tribe reveal a
darker side to missionaries: “the young Indians would not be permitted to take more than
one wife” (Oskison 53). This statement foretells the problem of future generations of
Native Americans. The Christian missionaries have decided to take control over Native
American affairs within the community, and force Native Americans to give up slowly
their cultural identity. The missionary has decided the Native Americans can no longer
practice certain parts of their culture, in hopes it will whittle down resistance to
Christianity.

Harjo plays on the schema of the natural Indian. He does not speak good English,
and lives a simple life, but he is a good man. “The Story of Old Harjo” challenges the
accepted stereotype that Native American bigamy is practiced for reasons of prestige, and
shows that assimilation is impossible for all Native Americans. Oskison uses Harjo as a
reminder that traditional practices considered savage by Euro-Americans were far more
complicated than Euro-American records suggest.

Unlike Boudinot, Oskison realizes the connection between the Cherokee and the
land, and he supports the defense of it. His short story “When the Grass Grew Long”
revolves around Bill, a horse rustler, and his courting of a Cherokee girl. The Cherokee
girl and her family are poor and live on a small farm in Indian Territory. A year into his
courtship, during a hot summer day, the prairie grass around the Cherokee estate catches
fire. Bill, seeing the flames were consuming the household yelled, to the family to “‘Git
out o’ here, quick!” (Works 17). The family, especially the father Cherokee Jack, does
not yield to the young rancher’s order to leave his home. Despite the futility in fighting
the flames: “the fascination of the upcoming wall of destruction was upon the full-blood;
he was mad with the impulse to save his home,” and Cherokee Jack could not abandon his land and home (Works 18). In Cherokee Jack’s unwillingness to leave his homestead, Oskison vividly displays the importance of the land to the Cherokee identity. The home the Cherokee family lives on is simple and could easily be rebuilt, but Cherokee Jake will not give up his land. He is an old man who probably survived the Trail of Tears and would have been dispossessed by the United States of his homeland. Cherokee Jake will not allow this to happen a second time. Oskison wants the reader to witness the importance of land to a traditional Cherokee. He refers to Cherokee Jack as a ‘full-blood’ to reinforce his traditional identity. Despite his will to save his home, Cherokee Jake and his daughter ultimately succumb to the flames engulfing their home and die. The story that appears to be about courtship is in actuality an insight into the mindset of a Native American sacrificing everything for his land. Bill could not understand why Cherokee Jack continued to battle the flames because he did not understand the history that motivated his actions.

Oskison’s vision of equal opportunity for Cherokees did not happen in his lifetime. Oskison’s ideal that Cherokee children should attend school with Euro-Americans while still maintaining their Cherokee identity is achieved by Marilou Awiakta—a late twentieth-century Cherokee writer. Born in the Appalachian Mountains, Marilou Awiakta’s family did not participate in the Trail of Tears, and instead hid deep within the mountains and intermarried with Celtic immigrants. Awiakta was born in the late 1930’s in Tennessee and Awiakta’s life changed forever when “a new frontier,” one “that shook the earth” opened up—Oak Ridge (Appalachia 26, 27). Oak Ridge was the site of uranium enrichment for the Manhattan Project. The rural area
that Awiakta was born into was quickly transformed into an area of scientific discovery.

Similar to the original encroachment of Euro-Americans on Cherokee lands, the Appalachian culture Awiakta was a part of was bombarded with a culture of scientific elitism. While she received an education with the children of the scientists at Oak Ridge, her peers, who pressured her to convert to their ideology, attacked her cultural identity. Awiakta became a pragmatist as she matured and does not experience anxiety over assimilation. She experiences the world peacefully through a Cherokee and Appalachian perspective.

   Awiakta desires the Cherokee closeness with nature and does not view the traditional as heathenistic or savage. In her poem “An Indian Walks In Me” Awiakta shows her foundation is not in the science “of atoms” but in her Cherokee heritage (Appalachia 3). Unlike Boudinot, Awiakta does not attempt to adopt every value of Euro-American culture, instead she decides “not to follow any rule that splits her soul,” and she “seeks the whole in strength and peace” (Appalachia 3). Awiakta is comfortable with her Appalachian/Cherokee ancestry, and by seeking peace, she establishes herself in the role of a “white” peace chief in the traditional Cherokee Government. Before the Cherokee Nation consolidated its tribal government into a republic, the various towns of the Cherokee possessed Cherokee Chiefs who made decisions for the town. There were two types of chiefs, white peace chiefs who made decisions regarding most of the towns’ problems, and red chiefs who made decisions regarding war and were in charge of the community during states of war. Awiakta, like the peace chiefs, is concerned with bringing people together in peaceful solutions that benefit the community.
In *Selu Seeking the Corn-Mother’s Wisdom* she also chides the Euro-American understanding of traditional thought: “take away its cultural context, cut out its spiritual heart— as many people do who are unaware or unmindful of Native storytelling tradition — and instead of a compass you have an archaic legend” (Selu 16). Awiakta realizes the reason Native American religions were misunderstood by Euro-Americans is they did not care about the Native cultures. The missionaries in *The Singing Bird* demonstrate this idea. Dan originally possessed an ardent zeal to assimilate and convert the Cherokee, but only when he is living among the Cherokee and experiencing their culture does his view soften. The purpose of religion according to Awiakta is to “reveal spiritual truth not facts” (Selu 16). The conflict that Euro-Americans have is they believe that “a discrepancy in fact calls the validity of what is being said into question” (Selu 15). This idea comes from scientific reasoning. The pattern of logic makes it difficult for adherents to have faith in the merit of traditional stories.

The emotional strength of the Native American to endure is praised in “Mother’s Advise While Bandaging My Stubbed Toe”: “Go barefoot and feel the joy/ and when pain comes, bind you toe/ and go on your way again./ ‘Be plucky like an Indian’” (Appalachia 36). Life is full of injuries that “the toughest sole can’t bear” and in these situations, Awiakta remembers the tenacity of her Cherokee ancestors. This ability to survive hardship contradicts the ‘Disappearing Indian’ stereotype that Native Americans are unable to adapt to the influence of Euro-American culture and helps her through her own tribulations like the Tellico Dam incident.

Awiakta appreciates the traditional Cherokee religion and applies the stories to the present. In the late 1970’s the government proposed to build a dam that would flood
many historical towns of the Cherokee people including Sequoyah’s birthplace. Both the Eastern and Oklahoman Cherokee Nations sued under the first amendment to stop construction of the dam. Awiakta became involved with the movement to stop the construction, but the effort was to no avail and the government sided with big business. For her “Tellico became a lake of tears” and the dam was another removal (Selu 61). This removal was not one of people but of Cherokee history. The correlations between the events are strong for Awiakta as she believes in the cyclical nature of time: “[the] future is now the past, which feeds the continuous story of Tellico” (Selu 61). The plight of the dam is a continuation of the removal from her perspective. The wounds of removal are not in the past for Awiakta, or other Cherokee, for the abandonment of these settlements submerged in water was because of the Removal Act. The Cherokee did not choose to leave their homes; neither did they choose to have the Tellico Dam permanently flood their historic homes.

Awiakta knows Euro-Americans will not always understand her perspective, but she does not concede their view. As a child, the scientists who were working at Oak Ridge brought their children to Tennessee. The children of the scientists were skeptical of the traditional lifestyle of the native people of the area. In “Arrows of Laughter Arrows of Love” Awiakta shows the disconnect between Euro-American science and her traditional view:

Mother Little Deer was in the woods today. I felt him move near where I stood / and I kept still... ‘And did you see him?’/ Not this time./ When I told the kids at school they laughed and laughed said I was a fool to believe in such a thing./ ‘And how do they know?’ They say the facts tell them so.../...An albino might be found ,they say,/ but he’d be so shy of light/ That you might never see him./ There’d be no magic in his horns/ and he’d be born and die/ like all deer do... (39)
This event early in her life shows the disconnect Awiakta experienced in her own home. The new families who moved into the new frontier were similar to the early Euro-American pioneers when they settled in Cherokee lands. The little deer she is describing is Awi Usdi, an immortal white deer who taught the Cherokee not to overhunt animal populations and to give thanks before they killed an animal, or they would be inflicted with rheumatism. Underlying this story is not only the practical lesson to not overhunt a food supply, but it also teaches a deep respect for nature. Despite the lessons that could be learned from an analysis of the story, the children were not interested in what they could learn from the stories of the people: “anyone who spoke in images was labeled ‘backward’ (Selu 30). When she was at school, her heritage was dismissed by her new classmates: “they don’t have any ‘culture’” (Selu 147). Their arguments repeated those used against her ancestors. Her classmates wanted her to assimilate to their scientific reasoning regarding nature just as earlier generations of Euro-Americans wanted the Cherokee to assimilate to their God. With this influx of people, Awiakta was a minority in her own town. The children pressured her to give up the traditional stories, and they tried to use scientific reasoning to justify their perspective, but Awiakta did not give in to their demands.

She learned not to tell others about her beliefs and “be still and wait…/Awi Usdi comes from the deep and you’re too young to see him…one day you may come home to find him waiting here”(Awiakta 39). Awiakta believes traditional stories such as Awi Usdi are “a seed” that when “planted in a child’s mind the story matures along with the child, nourishing him or her to grow in wisdom and stature. Story and life interweave” (Awiakta 19). The influence of traditional stories should not be removed from education
but should coexist with science. Science is the study of the natural world and this study should not mean the extinguishing of traditional cultural or assimilation to a strictly Euro-American perspective.

Awiakta believes science is coming back to a spiritual understanding. Oak Ridge was a major center in the atomic scientific frontier. Scientists were constantly challenging what was possible, and discovering new questions that perplexed them and defied conventional thought. At first, when the scientist split the atom they “described it in heavy, concrete prose,” but once the scientists started to look within the atom “the language of science [came] around. The atom has found its poetry again” (Appalachia 48). It was the study of the quark, a strange subatomic particle, that challenged scientists and “as researched progressed the word mystery began to appear in scientific writing” (Selu 69). Awiakta applies the traditional Cherokee view on time to science as she did to the removal and Tellico Dam. According to Awiakta, science is returning to the feeling of wonder that traditional religion once gave the Cherokee. Viewing nature not as a thing but as a quark, a wondrous living object, is consistent with a traditional Cherokee understanding of the natural world.

In “Star Vision” Awiakta describes what it is like to see the world from a traditional Cherokee perspective. As the poem begins she is surrounded by nature, viewing it normally until her “Cherokee stepped into her mind” and she could “see each atom’s tiny star” (Appalachia 49). This spirit is the same one Awiakta referred to in her earlier poem “An Indian Walks In Me”. When the spirit comes to her consciousness, the world of science and tradition merge and for an instant, the night sky is illuminated with
the power within commonplace natural items. Awiakta knows Euro-Americans can learn from the traditional stories and share in Cherokee culture as they share the land.

Eventually Oak Ridge was decommissioned and the dormant reactor was opened to the public. When Awiakta went to Oak Ridge, she was not awed by the science of the reactor but by the love the scientist displayed toward it. The reactor was called ‘the graphite queen’ by the scientist who worked there, and she “was a loyal queen, they said, and strong...And they tell how she met her end— standing with life fading slowly...slowly...standing as becomes a queen whose power was of life itself” (Appalachia 53). Awiakta felt the reverence of the scientist toward the machine, and it impressed on her hope for the future of science. She believes that when “people call Earth ‘it’/ they use her/ consume her strength.”, but when “people call Earth ‘Mother’/ they talk with love” (Selu 6). The scientist at Oak Ridge revered their machine and respected the power of the atom. Because of their respect, the reactor was able to supply power peacefully for twenty years. Within the reactor in the mountain, Awiakta found Awa Usdi— the traditional Cherokee story that teaches reverence for nature for the first time. Awa Usdi teaches Cherokee to love the land and take care of it. In Oak Ridge, in a fission reactor, she witnessed the love of Awa Usdi by Euro-Americans. Oak Ridge is “Where Atom and Mountain Meet” and a turning point in Euro-American thought where science and traditional thought merge (Appalachia 56). Awiakta weaves together different cultural identities, one of science and one of Cherokee tradition, and finds balance within herself and nature.

Throughout written Cherokee history, the question of cultural assimilation has been debated. Many different conclusions have been reached on the debate with various
results. Skiagunsta realized an over reliance on English goods had weakened Cherokee sovereignty, and he knew this reliance had changed the habits of the Cherokee people. Skiagunsta was similar to Cassandra of Greek mythology who could see the problems around him, but no one heeded his advice. The dependency on goods he first described is eerily similar to majority opinion in *Cherokee Nation vs. Georgia*. The Supreme Court ruled the United States has “the sole and exclusive right of regulating trade with them” (Prucha 58). The court claimed the Cherokee were dependent on the United States for commerce and thus a dependent nation.

One of the tenets of the traditional Cherokee religion was the Earth is a land between the forces of chaos and order. The Cherokee needed to maintain balance in order to stop the world from spinning out of control. In his journalism, Boudinot attempted to use Sequoyah’s syllabary to educate the Cherokee, but he had lost his balance and makes a terrible decision by acquiescing to removal. Boudinot lost his balance when he studied and lived in New England. He believed Euro-American stereotypes he learned while he was isolated from his people. Boudinot wanted the Cherokee Nation to be preserved at any cost, but he did not realize the connection between the people and the land. His line of thinking is more similar to a progressive New Engander like Child than to a Cherokee’s thought process.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Oskison realized the connection of the Cherokee to their land in *The Singing Bird* and his short stories. In “When the Grass Grew Long” Cherokee men and women succumb to flames trying to save their small house. During Oskison’s life, the Cherokee Nation’s sovereignty was undermined in the state constitution of Oklahoma. This did not destroy the Cherokee people as Boudinot
had feared. Oskison realized the traditional Cherokee way of life had many things to teach the present generation. He knew that Euro-Americans stereotyped his ancestors and he rebuked their accusations in his works. Though Native Americans were still considered domestic dependents of the United States, he challenged the government to treat Native Americans as equals and educate them the same as Euro-Americans.

Because of the Manhattan Project, Awiakta was able to receive the same education as the children of Euro-Americans scientists. When the scientist came to work at the nuclear enrichment plant, they brought their children with them. In compensation for these uprooted families, the United States built schools for their children and the indigenous people. Although outsiders tried to dissuade her belief in traditional stories, she never forgot or dismissed her traditional upbringing. Unlike Boudinot, she sought the traditional balance of the Cherokee within her Euro-American heritage. Awiakta does not feel the anxieties that Boudinot felt about his Cherokee history. The assimilation question is not a problem for her as she accepts the best values of both cultures. Awiakta is the ideal postmodern Cherokee. She is able to compete with her Euro-American counterparts on a scientific level, and she is able to remain culturally a Cherokee. Her equal education and traditional background are the ideas that Oskison and Sequoyah sought to obtain. Awiakta’s activism on the behalf on the greater Cherokee good resemble the work of Boudinot in *The Cherokee Phoenix*; however, she sees the Cherokee land’s connection to the Cherokee people and fights to protect the land. Awiakta is the answer to the assimilation question as her activism and education allow her to compete in the Euro-American society while she maintains her Cherokee culture.
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