



Detail from an engraving by Isaac Basire. The seven Cherokee Indians whom Sir Alexander Cuming brought to London in 1730. The second from right, Ukwanequa, became the great chief Attacullaculla (Little Carpenter), according to Caroline Foreman, *Indians Abroad* (1943), 51. Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives, B.A.E. Neg. no. 1063-H-2.

How Indians Got to Be Red

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SCHOLARS WORKING ON THE HISTORY OF RACE AS AN IDEA assume that Europeans were the sole inventors of it.¹ Undeniably, race (the belief that people can be categorized by observable physical differences such as skin color) flourished with the early modern European slave trade. Sometime in the eighteenth century, race outpaced the older categories of Christian and pagan to become the primary justification for expropriating the land and labor of others. As a system of categorizing people, race fulfilled Europe's ideological needs by creating the illusion that human difference was biologically ordained.² But, as Europeans spun their web of racial hierarchies, what were non-Europeans thinking about race? Historians have yet to tackle this question in depth, instead focusing on how whites constructed images of others.³ This approach to the historical emergence of race as a system for categorizing people replicates what it purports to critique, since the emphasis on European image-making consigns American Indians and other non-white peoples to a passive role in the construction of knowledge. They exist only as the objects of white observation, and the power to label or name resides with Europeans.

One example of this tendency is the standard explanation for how Indians got to be "red": European explorers saw that Indians wore red paint and so called them

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¹ There are a few exceptions: Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford, Calif., 1992); Hiroshi Wagatsuma, "The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan," in *Color and Race*, John Hope Franklin, ed. (Boston, 1968), 129-65. I am here using race in a limited sense by focusing on skin color. For other applications, see, for example, John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven, Conn., 1994).

² Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, Colo., 1993); Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston, 1993); Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hamden, Conn., 1982).

³ The scholarship on Euro-American images of Indians is vast. See, for example, the special issue "Constructing Race," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (January 1997); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed., *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995); Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978); Olive Patricia Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the*

“red.”⁴ In “From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian,” Alden Vaughan moved toward correcting this misconception when he instead credited the Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus with making “red” a racial category in his 1740 edition of *Systema Naturae*.⁵ How Linnaeus arrived at “red” remains a small mystery. He may have heard of red-painted Indians, but the Greek physician Galen’s medical philosophy of the four humors must also have served as inspiration, for in the 1758 edition of *Systema Naturae*, Linnaeus attached telltale descriptive labels to each color of people: red people were choleric, white sanguine, yellow melancholic, and black phlegmatic. Thus Linnaeus adapted an existing system of color-based categories to account for differences between the world’s peoples.⁶

However, giving Linnaeus sole credit perpetuates another misconception. Lin-

Americas (Edmonton, 1984); Robert E. Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820–1880: The Early Years of American Ethnology* (Norman, Okla., 1986). One of the few books to reverse the lens of observation is Keith H. Basso, *Portraits of “The Whiteman”*: Linguistic Play and Cultural Symbols among the Western Apache (Cambridge, 1979), which examined Western Apaches’ perceptions of white “others” as revealed through joking imitations of them. Indians’ earliest ethnographic observations of Europeans are treated in James Axtell, “Through Another Glass Darkly: Early Indian Views of Europeans,” in Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1988), 125–43; and in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (New York, 1994). Indian ideas about race have been studied only in the context of Indian attitudes toward blacks; see, for example, James H. Merrell, “The Racial Education of the Catawba Indians,” *Journal of Southern History* 50 (August 1984): 363–84.

⁴ James P. Howley, *The Beothucks or Red Indians: The Original Inhabitants of Newfoundland* (Toronto, 1915), 2–3, 10, appears to have made the creative leap to John and Sebastian Cabot and Jacques Cartier as the first Europeans to call Indians “red.” However, Howley’s own evidence does not show this. There were no red-painted Indians in the first reports of the Cabot voyages, and Richard Hakluyt’s account of Cartier’s first voyage described, but did not label, Indians “who paint themselves with certain roan colours.” Howley’s earliest source for “red” Beothuks is an Englishman who in 1768 said, “The epithet of ‘red’ is given to these Indians, from their universal practice of colouring their garments, their canoes, bows, arrows, and every other utensil belonging to them, with red ochre,” quoted from F. D. Cartwright, *The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright* (London, 1826), 307. The authoritative *Handbook of North American Indians* accepted Howley’s claims that the Beothuks were the first “red” Indians. Barrie Reynolds, “Beothuk,” in Bruce G. Trigger, volume ed., *Northeast*, vol. 15, *Handbook of North American Indians*, William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed. (Washington, D.C., 1978), 101, 107. In J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d edn. (Oxford, 1989), 389, 421, 429, the “red man” and “Red-skin” entries cite the Beothuks but attribute the first “Red-skin” to a 1699 letter in Helen Evertson Smith, *Colonial Days and Ways, as Gathered from Family Papers* (New York, 1900). However, “redskin” was not common usage until the nineteenth century, which as Alden T. Vaughan has pointed out raises questions about this letter’s authenticity. See Vaughan, “From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian,” *AHR* 87 (October 1982): 948.

⁵ Vaughan, “From White Man to Redskin,” 932, 946–47.

⁶ Linnaeus’s most likely source for information on American Indians was a 1702 history of New Sweden, which did not describe Indians as red but as differing “in their colour; in some places being black, and in others, brown or yellow.” Thomas Campanium Holm, *Description of the Province of New Sweden, Now Called, by the English, Pennsylvania, in America*, Peter S. DuPonceau, trans. (1834; rpt. edn., Millwood, N.Y., 1975), 34–35. For Linnaeus’s categories, see T. Bendyshe, “The History of Anthropology,” *Memoirs Read before the Anthropological Society of London* 1 (1863–64): 421–58. For more on the four humors, see the chart of medieval thought in Maurice Hussey, *Chaucer’s World: A Pictorial Companion* (Cambridge, 1968); and Owsei Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973). Raymond D. Fogelson argued that Linnaeus arrived at white, black, red, and yellow because these are “basic colors,” as put forth by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay in their theory of color universals, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley, Calif., 1969); see Fogelson’s “Interpretations of the American Indian Psyche: Some Historical Notes,” in *Social Contexts of American Ethnology, 1840–1984*, June Helm, ed. (Washington, D.C., 1985), 9.

naeus chose “red” as a category for Indians, but he was not the first person to do so. More than a decade before the 1740 edition of *Systema Naturae*, American Indians, particularly Indians in the Southeast, were calling themselves “red.” This article discusses when, how, and why southeastern Indians introduced the term “red people,” or “red men,” into the language of Indian-European contact. It then explores what “red” meant to one southeastern Indian group, the Cherokees, in their initial encounters with English colonists and in their later encounters with Americans. While Linnaeus groped toward an explanation of difference embedded in the human body, eighteenth-century southeastern Indians, in dialogue with Europeans, drew on their own color symbolism to develop categories that could account for biological, cultural, and political differences.

BY THE MID-1720S, FROM LOUISIANA TO SOUTH CAROLINA, Indians were claiming the category “red” for themselves in the arena of Indian-European diplomacy. In 1725, the French asked a group of Indians in council at Mobile whether they would like to become Christian and recorded a Taensas chief’s response:

Long ago . . . there were three men in a cave, one white, one red and one black. The white man went out first and he took the good road that led him into a fine hunting ground . . . The red man who is the Indian, for they call themselves in their language “Red Men,” went out of the cave second. He went astray from the good road and took another which led him into a country where the hunting was less abundant. The black man, who is the negro, having been the third to go out, got entirely lost in a very bad country in which he did not find anything on which to live. Since that time the red man and the black man have been looking for the white man to restore them to the good road.⁷

This Taensas chief divided humankind into three color-based categories. Moreover, his French audience understood “Red Men” to be an Indian contribution to the lexicon of French settlement in North America.

While this story was being told to the French near the Mississippi River, Indians further to the east were introducing the term “red people” into English-Indian diplomacy. In George Chicken’s journal of a 1725 delegation to the Cherokees, several Chickasaws arrived at the council and said they wanted “peace with the White people and desire[d] to have their own way and to take revenge of the red people,” by which they meant the Creek Indians. Throughout the journal, Chicken himself called Indians simply “Indians.”⁸ A year later, the English in South Carolina negotiated a peace between the Creeks and Cherokees. Adhering to diplomatic custom, a Creek headman, Chigilee, offered a “large white Eagle’s Wing” to the Cherokees and said he wanted peace with them. The Cherokee speaker responded, “I See Your white Wing there, but Shall not receive it till I find you’l be good to the white People, nor will I till you talke further; It is now come to this. We are the Red People now mett together. Our flesh is both alike, but we must have further Talke with you.” Later in the council, the Creek-allied Cowetaw Warrior called the

⁷ Father Raphael to the Abbe Raguét, May 15, 1725, in Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders, eds., *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, 3 vols. (Jackson, Miss., 1927–32), 2: 486.

⁸ “Colonel Chicken’s Journal to the Cherokees, 1725,” *Travels in the American Colonies*, Newton D. Mereness, ed. (New York, 1916), 169.

Cherokees “those Red People,” and another Indian speaker remarked that “the greate men of the white & Red people are now friends, and it Shall never be my ffault if this peace is broke.” In the council transcript, the phrase “red people” appears only within the speeches of Indian delegates.⁹

“Red” Indians quickly became standard usage in southeastern Indian diplomacy. By the 1730s, the French in Louisiana had incorporated “red men” into the language of French-Indian diplomacy and had adopted the term as a generic label for Indians in their own correspondence.¹⁰ And by the 1750s, the English in the Southeast addressed Indians as “red people,” although the English used the term less often than Indian speakers and usually only in response to an Indian speech.¹¹

In every instance, “red men” and “red people” were forms of address unaccompanied by European descriptions of Indians. Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, a French farmer in Louisiana who later wrote a book about his experiences, called Indians “Hommes Rouges” but believed that they were born white and then “turn[ed] brown, as they are rubbed with bear’s oil and exposed to the sun.”¹² Other Europeans also commented on how Indians looked and what color they were, either with paint or without paint, but rarely was that color red. Eighteenth-century accounts of Indians tended to follow the pattern set by the earliest European explorers of the Southeast, the Spanish, and described Indians as “brown of skin” but “painted and ochred, red, black, white, yellow and vermilion in stripes.”¹³ The

⁹ “Generall Conference betweene the Headmen of the Cherokees and the Lower Creeke Indians in the Presence of Both Houses,” January 26, 1726, British Public Record Office, C.O. 5.387.245–47, in microfilm collection indexed in William L. Anderson and James A. Lewis, *A Guide to Cherokee Documents in Foreign Archives* (Metuchen, N.J., 1983), and available from Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina.

¹⁰ “Red men” appears in Indian and French speeches and in French writings intended for French readers in Regis du Roullet, “Journal of the Journey That I Made in the Choctaw Nation in the Year 1729”; Louboey to Maurepas (n.d., probably 1733); Louboey to Maurepas, July 11, 1738, in Rowland and Sanders, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, 1: 30, 33, 40, 91, 92, 93, 97, 98, 105, 221, 371; Diron d’Artaguette to Maurepas, October 24, 1737, in Patricia Kay Galloway, rev. and ed., *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, vol. 4, 1729–1748 (Baton Rouge, La., 1984), 149; “Journal of De Beauchamps’ Journey to the Choctaws, 1746,” in Mereness, *Travels*, 267, 271, 274, 276, 278, 282, 291, 294.

¹¹ In the 1750s, the governor of South Carolina called Indians “red” in speeches to them; see William L. McDowell, Jr., ed., *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, May 21, 1750–August 7, 1754* (Columbia, S.C., 1958), 445 (hereafter, *DRIA 1750–1754*); *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, 1754–1765* (Columbia, 1970), 481 (hereafter, *DRIA 1754–1765*). In “Journal of the Congress of the Four Southern Governors, and the Superintendent of That District, with the Five Nations of Indians [Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Cherokee, Catawba]” (1763), British Public Record Office, C.O. 323.17.223, 226–29, in Anderson and Lewis, *Guide to Cherokee Documents in Foreign Archives*, all the Indian speakers refer to “red people,” as does the British Indian agent John Stuart. After the Seven Years’ War, the English sent a “Harrangue” to Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley, addressing them as “Red Men,” in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Provincial Archives: English Dominion, 1763–1766* (Nashville, Tenn., 1911), 80, 82, 83, 85–87. The Indian trader James Adair used “red people” to mean Indians in his important account of southeastern Indians, published in 1775; Samuel Cole Williams, ed., *Adair’s History of the American Indians* (Johnson City, Tenn., 1930).

¹² Antoine Simon le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana*, Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., ed. (1774; rpt. edn., Baton Rouge, La., 1975), 324. Because the English translation modified the French original extensively, I have only quoted from the English after ensuring that the quoted material adheres to the French, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (Paris, 1758).

¹³ Edward Gaylord Bourne, *Narratives of the Career of Hernando de Soto in the Conquest of Florida, as Told by a Knight of Elvas, and in a Relation by Luys Hernandez de Biedma, Factor of the Expedition*, 2 vols. (1904; rpt. edn., New York, 1922), 1: 66, 108; also see 1: 113; 2: 56, 136.

skin color Europeans most commonly attributed to Indians was “tawny.”¹⁴ Thus ethnographic descriptions of Indians mentioned a multitude of colors; only in the language of eighteenth-century French-Indian and English-Indian diplomacy were Indians “red people.”

There are two likely scenarios for why Indians began to identify themselves as “red.” First, “red” may have been an Indian response to meeting strange new people who called themselves “white” to distinguish themselves from their “black” or “Negro” slaves. Second, some Indians may have considered themselves “red” or been called so by other Indians before the arrival of Europeans. Actually, these are not mutually exclusive scenarios but instead work in combination. In a variety of situations, “red” was a logical category for Indians to claim for themselves, and then, just as the Columbus misnomer “Indian” spread to people at great distances from Columbus, the Caribbean, and 1492, the process of Indian-European contact gradually made “red” a generic label for all Indians.

The first scenario suggests that a kind of dialectic took place: Europeans called themselves “white,” and Indians responded with “red.” The best evidence for this scenario is the rarity of “red” Indians in the Northeast in contrast to comparable records for the Southeast. Origin stories like the one the Taensas chief told the French must have circulated to some extent among northeastern Indians, for a baptized Delaware Indian in the Ohio area told a Jesuit in 1757 that the Trinity had created “men, as we find them upon earth, as red, black and white, and that they had destined one for praying, another for hunting, and another for war.”¹⁵ Other rare uses of “Red Men” in the Northeast can be linked to Linnaeus. Pehr Kalm, a Swedish naturalist and Linnaeus protégé, mentioned “Red Men” several times in the journal of his trip from Delaware to Canada (1748–1751).¹⁶ (Kalm’s visits with Benjamin Franklin may have inspired Franklin’s “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind” [1851], which listed Indians among the world’s “tawny” peoples but then ambiguously proposed “excluding all Blacks and Tawneys” from America so that “the lovely White and Red” could prevail.¹⁷) Despite an occasional “red” in the historical record of the Northeast, when in council with the English, northeastern Indians did not call themselves “red” and were not called “red” by

¹⁴ Vaughan, “From White Man to Redskin,” 921–27; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580–1640* (Totowa, N.J., 1980), 35–37; Cornelius J. Jaenen, *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York, 1976), 22–23.

¹⁵ M. Pouchot, *Memoir upon the Late War in North America, Between the French and the English, 1755–60*, Franklin B. Hough, trans. and ed., 2 vols. (Roxbury, Mass., 1866), 1: 93. Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745–1815* (Baltimore, Md., 1992), deals with the role that this origin story and others played in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century pan-Indian resistance movements. Also, *peaux rouges*, precursor to the term “redskin” common to nineteenth-century English, probably originated as a self-identifier among Algonquian-speaking Indians in the Great Lakes region sometime in the eighteenth century. See the speech of Maringouin (1769), in James Sullivan, ed., *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 14 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1921–65), 7: 133.

¹⁶ Adolph B. Benson, ed., *Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America: The America of 1750; The English Version of 1770*, 2 vols. (1937; rpt. edn., New York, 1966), 2: 515, 518, 684, 686, 714.

¹⁷ In Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 32 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1959–96), 4: 234. For Franklin-Kalm-Linnaeus connections, see in this collection James Logan to Benjamin Franklin, November 9, 1748, 3: 325; Peter Kalm: Conversations with Franklin, 4: 53–63; Franklin to Peter Collinson, February 4, 1750, 4: 113; Franklin to Cadwallader Colden, April 12, 1753, 4: 465.

others. What had by mid-century become commonplace in the language of southeastern Indian diplomacy was still a novelty in the Northeast.¹⁸

Indian languages provide further evidence that the idea of “red” Indians was indigenous to the Southeast. From the St. Lawrence to the Upper Mississippi, the word “Indian,” when interpreted into native languages, usually came to be equated with the native word for “people,” sometimes translated as “men,” “real people,” or “original people.” The contemporary French historian Bacqueville de la Potherie observed this pattern in the Great Lakes region when he wrote of an Indian telling the fur trader Perrot “that when ‘the men’ arrived they would render him thanks; it is thus that all savages are designated among themselves, while they call the French, ‘French,’ and the [other] people from Europe by the names of their respective nations.”¹⁹

In contrast, in southeastern Indian languages, the word or phrase meaning “Indian” originates in the word for the color “red.” A nineteenth-century glossary of Natchez words collected by anthropologist Daniel Brinton translates “Indian, red man” into *tvmh-pakup* (man-red). In Choctaw and Chickasaw, closely related Muskogean languages, the word for Indian is *hatak api homma*, a combination of *hatak* (man) and *homma* (red). And in R. M. Loughridge’s dictionary of Muskogee (Creek), “Indian” is given as *estē-cātē*, man-red.²⁰ Because Indian speeches made their way into the historical record only after being translated into a European language, it is difficult to know exactly what was said at these councils. There must have been instances when an Indian speaker said *hatak api homma* and the interpreter said in English “Indian.” But when Englishmen said “Indian” and Frenchmen said *sauvage*, when and why did interpreters turn to the Choctaws or Chickasaws and say *hatak api homma*? At some point in the dialogue between Indians and Europeans, “Indians” came to mean “red men” or “red people” in the native languages of southeastern Indians.

¹⁸ “Red” Indians do not appear in any of these document collections relating to Dutch, English, and French interaction with Indians in the middle colonies: Lawrence H. Leder, ed., *The Livingston Indian Records, 1666–1723* (Gettysburg, 1956); Sylvester K. Stevens and Donald H. Kent, eds., *Wilderness Chronicles of Northwestern Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1941); Donald H. Kent, ed., *Pennsylvania and Delaware Treaties, 1629–1737*, Vol. 1 of *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607–1789*, Alden T. Vaughan, gen. ed. (Washington, D.C., 1979). E. B. O’Callaghan, ed., *The Documentary History of the State of New-York*, 4 vols. (Albany, 1849), 2: 1110, has one reference to “Indians, (or what are called Redmen)” in a 1792 discussion about the Oneidas. A contingent of Iroquois visiting the Cherokees in 1751 sent a “written talk” to the governor of South Carolina, calling the Catawbas “red People,” but southeastern trader Adair probably put this talk into writing, *DRIA 1750–1754*, 47.

¹⁹ Claude Charles Le Roy, Bacqueville de la Potherie, *Histoire de l’Amérique Septentrionale* (1716), in *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, Emma Helen Blair, ed., 2 vols. (Cleveland, Ohio, 1911), 2: 114. A 1791 word list for the same region translated “Indians” into “Ishinawbah” in Algonquian and “Nishinnorbay” in Ojibwa (Chippewa); both terms would today be written as “Anishinabeg,” meaning “the people”; see J. Long, *Voyages and Travels of an Indian Interpreter and Trader* (1791; rpt. edn., Toronto, 1971), 203.

²⁰ Daniel G. Brinton, “On the Language of the Natchez,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 13 (1873): 488; Charles D. Van Tuyl, *The Natchez: Annotated Translations from Antoine Simon le Page du Pratz’s Histoire de la Louisiane and A Short English-Natchez Dictionary* (Oklahoma City, 1979), 87. Cyrus Byington, *A Dictionary of the Choctaw Language*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin no. 46, John R. Swanton and Henry S. Halbert, eds. (Washington, D.C., 1915), 534; Pamela Munro and Catherine Willmond, *Chickasaw: An Analytical Dictionary* (Norman, Okla., 1994), 101. R. M. Loughridge and Dave M. Hodge, *English and Muskogee Dictionary: Collected from Various Sources and Revised* (Philadelphia, 1914), 41, 48, 65.

The southeastern origins of “red” Indians is good evidence for the first scenario—that Indians called themselves “red” in response to meeting people who called themselves “white”—because Europeans settling the Southeast did indeed have a “white” identity. In the early 1700s, Carolina colonists, many of whom had emigrated from Barbados, already divided their world into “white, black, & Indians.”²¹ The first English colony to develop a plantation economy dependent on slave labor, Barbados may also have been the first English colony to experience the transition in identity from “Christian” to “white.” One mid-seventeenth-century visitor to Barbados, who wrote of “Negroes,” “Indians” and “Christians,” told an anecdote that may explain why “white” replaced “Christian.” A slave wished to become Christian, but the slave’s master responded that “we could not make a Christian a Slave . . . [nor] a Slave a Christian . . . , [for] being once a Christian, he could no more account him a Slave, and so lose the hold they had of them as Slaves, by making them Christians.”²² By the end of the seventeenth century, Barbadians who were neither black nor Indian were well on their way to becoming “white.”²³ When they left Barbados for Carolina, they brought “Negroe slaves” and an emerging “white” identity with them.

“Christians” in the Northeast lagged several decades behind their southern counterparts in self-identifying as “white.” The Dutch in New Netherland called themselves “Christian” for the duration of their control over the colony, and the English continued with “Christian” until about the 1730s, when the term “white people” began to appear with more frequency.²⁴ As in Barbados, black slavery seems to have caused the transition from “Christian” to “white.” In the 1740s, Sir William Johnson, British superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Northeast, wrote most often about relations between “Christians and Indians.” But when Johnson solicited an acquaintance to buy him some “Negroes,” for Johnson did own black slaves, he also asked for an indentured servant, “a good Cliver lad of a white man.”²⁵

²¹ Frank J. Klingberg, ed., *The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau, 1706–1717* (Berkeley, Calif., 1956), 22. Vaughan, “From White Man to Redskin,” 932, also determined that “white,” instead of “Christian,” appears earliest in South Carolina records. For the Barbados-Carolina connection, see Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 111–16.

²² Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (1673; rpt. edn., London, 1970), 50; for “Negroes and Indian slaves” versus “28 Christians,” see 22.

²³ Barbados resident Henry Winthrop wrote to John Winthrop, October 15, [1627], of “3 score of christyanes and fortye slaues of negeres and Indyenes,” Massachusetts Historical Society Committee on Publication, *Winthrop Papers*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1929–47), 1: 361. “An Act for the Governing of Negroes” (1688) used “Christian” and “White Man” as categories different from “Negroes or other Slaves”; similar laws regulating slavery, passed in 1692 and 1703, referred to “White Inhabitants,” “the Oath of any Christian,” “White Person,” and “Christian Servants”; see Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Barbadoes, from 1648, to 1718* (London, 1732), 119, 120, 125, 137, 140, 179–81.

²⁴ Any series of colonial documents will show this shift in language. In Kent, *Pennsylvania and Delaware Treaties*, the Dutch, Swedes, and English called themselves “Christian” (as well as Dutch, Swedish, or English) in the seventeenth century; “white people” first appears in a 1758 “Account of the Walking Purchase of 1686” (p. 81), placed amid seventeenth-century documents. Then, “white pepele” (p. 283) next appears in 1728, is interspersed in later documents with an occasional “Christian,” and, in the documents of the late 1730s, “Christian” refers to religious beliefs and has in other contexts been replaced by “white people.”

²⁵ Compare “fifty Indians. & as Many Christians,” in William Johnson to George Clinton, March 15,

When English settlers in Carolina first met Indians, they called themselves “white people,” a term that could be literally translated into native languages. A different naming process must have occurred in the Northeast because “Christian” cannot be translated into native languages. Instead, the names Indians invented for Europeans predominated. The Iroquois, for example, called Europeans “hatchetmakers.” In English translations of Indian speeches, Indian speakers seem to be using “Christian” in the seventeenth century and “white people” by the mid-eighteenth century, but probably it was the interpreters who changed, first interpreting the Iroquois word for “hatchetmakers” into “Christians” and later into “white people.”²⁶

The Southeast also makes sense for the second component of the dialectic—why Indians responded with “red” instead of yellow, brown, or even tawny. Red and white symbols, articulating a dualism between war and peace, permeated southeastern Indian cultures. White was “their fixt emblem of peace, friendship, happiness, prosperity, purity, holiness, &c.”²⁷ The “white path” meant peaceful relations between towns or nations. The “red” or “bloody” path meant war.²⁸ War chiefs “painted blood-red” and civil chiefs “painted milk white” shared political authority within towns, and towns themselves were designated “white” or “red” as a means to delegate intratribal responsibilities in times of peace and war.²⁹ “Red” and “white” were, therefore, metaphors for moieties, or complementary divisions, within southeastern Indian societies. Although northern tribes such as the Iroquois understood red and white symbols to stand for war and peace, the juxtaposition of “red” and “white” rarely figured in the discourse and ritual of Iroquois diplomacy.³⁰ For southeastern Indians, “red” would have been the logical rejoinder to “white.” Indeed, at the 1725–1726 councils with the English, mentioned earlier, Indians who spoke of bringing “red people” and “white people” together may have meant people who advocated war and people who advocated peace. The English did appear as peacemakers at these councils, and the Indians may have thought that was why they were calling themselves “white people.” The English, meanwhile, probably understood the Indian phrase “red people” to be only a reference to complexion.

This first scenario for how Indians got to be “red” fits the English Southeast but

1747/8, with Johnson’s letter to Capt. Ross, May 30, 1749, giving instructions to purchase slaves and servants, in Sullivan, *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 1: 146, 230.

²⁶ “As soon as the Hatchet-makers (their general Name for Christians) arrived,” Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada* (1747; rpt. edn., Toronto, 1972), 167. Also see Daniel K. Richter’s discussion of the mistranslation of an Iroquois speech juxtaposing *Asseroenis* (“axe-makers”) and *Onqwes* (“human beings”) in *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992), 353–54.

²⁷ Williams, *Adair’s History*, 167.

²⁸ Headmen of the Lower Towns and Warriors of Kewee to Governor Lyttelton, March 2, 1758, *DRIA 1754–1765*, 444.

²⁹ Samuel Cole Williams, ed., *Lieut. Henry Timberlake’s Memoirs, 1756–1765* (Marietta, Ga., 1948), 63–64. Also see John Stuart to Board of Trade, March 9, 1764, British Public Record Office, C.O. 323.17.256–57, in Anderson and Lewis, *Guide to Cherokee Records in Foreign Archives*; Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1976), 234–39.

³⁰ The Iroquois had their own prevailing metaphors—the longhouse, the great tree, and the covenant chain—none of which made much reference to colors. Francis Jennings, ed., *The History and Culture of Iroquois Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1985), see esp. 88, 122, 129.

less neatly explains why “red men” made its way into French-Indian diplomacy. The language evidence is the same. In the Mobilian trade jargon, the “vulgar tongue” in which the French and Indians communicated, the words for Indian, European, and African were rooted in words for the colors red, white, and black.³¹ And the French in Louisiana had “Nègre” slaves and a “blanc” identity. André Pénicaut, a member of Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville’s 1698 expedition to the Lower Mississippi, explained the Indians’ curiosity about the French as caused by their being “astonished at seeing white-skinned people.” Later, when offered “as many women as there were men in our party,” Iberville held out his hand to the Indians and “made them understand that their skin—red and tanned—should not come close to that of the French, which was white.” This is, incidentally, one of the few references to Indians having red skin; elsewhere in his account, Pénicaut described Indians as having “very tawny skin.”³²

In contrast to the English in Carolina, however, the French did not so persistently refer to themselves as “white people” but self-identified more often by nationality: “les Français.”³³ The transcripts of Indian-European councils reveal another difference. When in conversation with the English, Indians usually paired “red people” with “white people” as though they were thinking of complementary moieties. In the French records, “red men” appears alone, suggesting that “red” emerged independently from French claims to the category “white.”

THE SECOND SCENARIO FOR THE ORIGINS OF “RED” fits French-Indian relations better. Early in their explorations of the Mississippi, the French encountered several Indian groups who already had “red” identities. “Red men,” once introduced into diplomatic discourse by one Indian tribe, might have spread geographically and become part of the language of people unfamiliar with its origin. The French planter Le Page du Pratz implied that this was the case. Although he sometimes called the Natchez “Hommes Rouges,” he also wrote, “When the Natchez retired to this part of America, where I saw them, they there found several nations, or rather the remains of several nations, some on the east, others on the west of the Mississippi. These are the people who are distinguished among the natives by the name of Red Men; and their origin is so much the more obscure, as they have not so distinct a tradition, as the Natchez.”³⁴

Undoubtedly, one such tribe was the Houmas, a Muskogean-speaking people in

³¹ The Mobilian trade jargon had a limited vocabulary, mostly derived from Choctaw and other Western Muskogean languages. In the vocabulary compiled by linguist James Crawford, the Mobilian words for “negroes” and “white people” derived solely from the colors black and white, but “Indian” could either be expressed as “hatak api humma” (“red man” in Western Muskogean) or as “sovaz,” a variation on the French *sauvage*. James M. Crawford, *The Mobilian Trade Language* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1978), 81–97.

³² Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams, ed., *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, La., 1953), 4, 24, 4.

³³ In the few French references to “whites,” the term was usually linked or juxtaposed with “blacks”: “Only two whites and five negroes escaped” or “whites, and mulattoes and blacks”; Périé to Maurepas, August 1, 1730, in Galloway, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, 4: 37; Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville, *Iberville’s Gulf Journals*, Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams, trans. and ed. (University, Ala., 1981), 154.

³⁴ Le Page du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, 298.

the Lower Mississippi Valley whose name translates into English as “red.” Early French expeditions of the Southeast, headed by La Salle and Iberville in the 1680s and 1690s, encountered “Oumas” near the mouth of the Mississippi. But these exploring parties communicated with Indians largely by signs, and neither La Salle nor Iberville translated “Ouma” into “red” or seemed to be aware of what it meant.³⁵ In early meetings with Indians along the Mississippi, as the French worked to acquire the rudiments of native languages, they may have inadvertently used native ways of speaking in such a way as to popularize “red men” as a catch phrase for all Indians.

How and when certain tribes came to be called “red” is unclear, but there seems to have been some connection between a “red” identity and origin stories. According to anthropologist John R. Swanton, the Houmas and the neighboring Chakchiumas owed their tribal names to the red crawfish that created the earth.³⁶ Another “red” tribe whom the French encountered in explorations further to the north were the Mesquakies, or “red earths,” whose origin story tells of how “the first men and the first women [were made] out of clay that was as red as the reddest blood.”³⁷ Origin stories such as these could also be adapted to account for differences between peoples. A twentieth-century folklorist recorded that “the Saukies (Saukieock, to speak the plural as they do) say jokingly that Geechee Manito-ah made the Saukie out of yellow clay and the Squakie out of red.”³⁸

Just as some Indians used animals to create metaphorical social divisions, called totems or clans, southeastern Indians may have used their variegated landscape to explain differences between peoples. European explorers of the Southeast were especially struck by the colors of the land. One trader said of Chickasaw country, “The Land here is a thinn mold on Topp of a red stiff Clay and white Marle.”³⁹ Le Page du Pratz characterized lower Louisiana as abounding in red clay, although “the White Hill” near the Natchez had “several veins of an earth, that is white, greasy, and very fine, with which I have seen very good potters ware made. On the same hill there are veins of ochre, of which the Natchez had just taken some to stain their earthen ware, which looked well enough; when it was besmeared with ochre, it became red on burning.”⁴⁰ An Englishman described what was probably the same hill as being made of “White Clay streaked with Red & Yellow,” and later in his journey he “Remark’d a Reddish soil somewhat like Red ocre, which the Indians use instead of Vermillion when they cannot get the latter.”⁴¹

³⁵ The “Oumas” are mentioned in “Narrative of the Expedition of M. Cavalier De La Salle” (1682) and “Historical Journal: or, Narrative of the Expedition Made by Order of Louis XIV., King of France, under Command of M. D’Iberville to Explore the Colbert (Mississippi) River and Establish a Colony in Louisiana” (1698), both in B. F. French, ed., *Historical Collections of Louisiana and Florida* (New York, 1875), 22, 93. Also see McWilliams, *Iberville’s Gulf Journals*, 65.

³⁶ John R. Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin no. 43 (Washington, D.C., 1911), 29.

³⁷ This version of the Mesquakie origin story comes from a native Mesquakie ethnographer, William Jones, “Episodes in the Culture-Hero Myth of the Sauks and Foxes,” *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 14 (1901): 239, 237.

³⁸ Mary Alicia Owen, *Folk-lore of the Musquakie Indians of North America* (London, 1904), 18.

³⁹ Alexander Moore, ed., *Nairne’s Muskogean Journals: The 1708 Expedition to the Mississippi River* (Jackson, Miss., 1988), 59.

⁴⁰ Le Page du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, 25–26, also see 131.

⁴¹ Edward Mease, “Narrative of a Journey through Several Parts of the Province of West Florida in

Before European trade introduced vermillion, Indians made paint out of clay, and paint marked social positioning, whether one was for war or peace, for example. The colors of the land matched the color symbolism of southeastern Indians in other contexts. The Taensas, who were related to the Natchez and also lived near this white, red, and yellow clay cliff, replicated these colors in their temple, which a French Jesuit described as having on the outside “three figures of eagles made of wood, and painted red, yellow, and white.” Inside the temple, shelves held baskets of “Idols,” including “figures of men and women made of stone or baked clay.”⁴² These “figures” might have been references to the Taensas origin story, if it resembled that of the Natchez. According to Le Page du Pratz, “The guardian of the [Natchez] temple having told me that God had made man with his own hands, I asked him if he knew how that was done. He answered, ‘that God had kneaded some clay, such as that which potters use, and had made it into a little man; and that after examining it, and finding it well formed, he blew up his work, and forthwith that little man had life, grew, acted, walked, and found himself a man perfectly well shaped.’”⁴³ Le Page du Pratz did not ask whether God used red, white, or yellow clay.

Not all Indians believed that people originated in clay. H. B. Cushman, writing in the nineteenth century, recorded that

in regard to the origin of man, the one [story] generally accepted among the Choctaws, as well as many other tribes was that man and all other forms of life had originated from the common mother earth through the agency of the Great Spirit; . . . that the human race sprang from many different primeval pairs created by the Great Spirit in various parts of the earth in which man was found; and according to the different natural features of the world in which man abode, so their views varied with regard to the substance of which man was created; [whether from the trees, from the rocks, or from the earth.]⁴⁴

The stories Le Page du Pratz and Cushman heard may have been the same stories told among the Natchez and Choctaws before the arrival of Europeans, new stories created for the benefit of European listeners, or old stories adjusted to account for the existence of Europeans. Origin stories in the historical record are naturally suspect. They often appear within the accounts of missionaries, who were eager to hear native explanations of how the world was created so that they could correct them and tell how the world was really created. Anticipating what missionaries

the Years 1770 and 1771,” in Mrs. Dunbar Rowland, ed., “Peter Chester: Third Governor of the Province of West Florida under British Dominion, 1770–1781,” *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, Dunbar Rowland, ed., vol. 5 (Jackson, Miss., 1925), 76, 83.

⁴² Father Le Petit to Father d’Avaugour, 1730, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610–1791*, 73 vols. (Cleveland, Ohio, 1896–1901), 68: 123, 125. Le Petit said this was the Natchez temple, but Swanton compared the dates and other descriptions of the Natchez and Taensas temples and concluded that Le Petit confused the Taensas with the Natchez, a common mistake at the time. Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 4.

⁴³ Le Page du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, 330.

⁴⁴ H. B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians*, Angie Debo, ed. (1899; rpt. edn., New York, 1962), 198–99.

wanted to hear, Indians who were already acquainted with the biblical account may have recycled some version of it for the missionaries' benefit.⁴⁵

Curiously, at least one proselytizing Christian, Roger Williams of Rhode Island, faithfully translated the Hebrew word *adam*, which means red earth or soil, into an Algonquian language, consequently telling Indians that God had made the first man out of red earth. However, Williams's Indian acquaintances rejected his version, insisting that God carved the first people out of stone but, dissatisfied with the result, made them from a tree instead.⁴⁶ Since seventeenth-century New England Indians were not thought of as "red," Williams's origin story lacked the political content it could have assumed in other times and places.⁴⁷ And yet, if missionaries elsewhere followed Williams's example, some Indians might have found this origin story compatible with their own or a story worth appropriating.

Eighteenth-century Europeans were themselves engaged in a struggle to keep the truth of their origin story alive, despite the challenge to it incurred with the European "discovery" of the Americas. The rise of black slavery was just one cause behind the collapse of Christian and pagan as a system of categories and the emergence of new categories based on the science of race. A second reason for the shift to a new set of categories must have been the hard questions posed by the existence of Indians: Were Indians descended from Adam and Eve or were there separate creations? Were Indians the lost tribe of Israel? Were they on the ark with Noah?⁴⁸ As Europeans debated how to fit Native Americans into the biblical account of human origins, Indians must also have been discussing how to fit the appearance of these new people, Europeans and Africans, into their stories of human creation. Like the Genesis story, the Natchez and Choctaw stories described the divine origins of humans but could also be adapted to explain or allow for differences among humans: Indians, Europeans, and Africans "came out of the ground" in different places and thus were different peoples.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ For example, see Klingberg, *Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau*, 68. Also, as William G. McLoughlin noted, some Indian origin stories derived from African folktales; see "A Note on African Sources of American Indian Racial Myths," in William G. McLoughlin with Walter H. Conser, Jr., and Virginia Duffy McLoughlin, *The Cherokee Ghost Dance: Essays on the Southeastern Indians, 1789–1861* (Macon, Ga., 1984), 253–60. For European influence on Indian origin stories, see William G. McLoughlin and Walter H. Conser, Jr., "'The First Man Was Red': Cherokee Responses to the Debates over Indian Origins, 1760–1860," *American Quarterly* 41 (June 1989): 243–64. McLoughlin and Conser say little about Cherokee influences on Cherokee origin stories, and, by focusing on "African Sources" and "Cherokee Responses," they risk giving the impression that every Cherokee origin story appearing in the historical record is derived from either blacks or whites.

⁴⁶ Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (London, 1643), 115.

⁴⁷ Seventeenth-century New Englanders called Indians "Indians," less often "Heathens," "Natives," "Savages" or "Salvages," and "Tawnies," but not "red." See John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War* (1736; rpt. edn., Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966); Benjamin Church, *Diary of King Philip's War, 1675–76*, Alan Simpson and Mary Simpson, intro. (Chester, Conn., 1975); Samuel G. Drake, ed., *The History of the Indians Wars in New England from the First Settlement to the Termination of the War with King Philip, in 1677: From the Original Work, by the Rev. William Hubbard [1677]* (1865; rpt. edn., New York, 1969); Charles H. Lincoln, ed., *Narratives of the Indian Wars, 1675–1699* (1913; rpt. edn., New York, 1959). The title of Russell Bourne's *The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England, 1675–1678* (New York, 1990) is anachronistic.

⁴⁸ European debates on the origins of Indians are surveyed in Lee Eldridge Huddleston, *Origins of the American Indians: European Concepts, 1492–1729* (Austin, Tex., 1967).

⁴⁹ "Came out of the ground" seems to have been predominantly an Iroquois expression, but Indians from other nations also used it to refer to what part of the country they originated in. Pouchot, *Memoir upon the Late War*, 2: 233; Meeting at Philadelphia, March 31, 1755, with Scarrooyady, *et al.*; Council

BUT WERE THEY, THEN, OF A DIFFERENT RACE? The first scenario for how Indians got to be “red”—“red” as a response to “white”—suggests that “red” and “white” were metaphors for assumed positions, like school colors today, and not racial categories rooted in biological difference. The second scenario, positing a pre-contact identity as “red” based on beliefs about origins, raises the possibility that Indians came to see “red” and “white” as designating innate, divinely ordained differences between peoples. Were “white” and “red” in European-Indian diplomacy intended as symbols that could be put on and taken off or did they refer to differences thought to be embedded in the body, in skin color? Unfortunately, there is no simple answer.

James Adair certainly thought that Indians had their own racial identity. A trader who lived for many years with the Cherokees and Chickasaws, Adair later tried to prove in his *History of the American Indians* that Indians descended from Jews. Like many of his contemporaries, Adair believed that “the Indian colour is not natural” but came from their “method of living.” However, he also wrote that Indians were “of a copper or red-clay colour” and “are so strongly attached to, and prejudiced in favour of, their own colour, that they think as meanly of the whites, as we possibly can do of them.”⁵⁰ His phrasing, “red-clay colour,” is unusual and may have come from conversations with Indians, not from his own observation.

More suggestive of race were eighteenth-century Indians’ efforts to determine social identity through empirical, biological criteria. A trader to the Cherokees told of how they had killed an enemy who “was by his Confession an Over the Lake Indian, and by his Whiteness they supposed him to be a whiteman’s Son.”⁵¹ Another trader described an incident in which Twightwee (Miami) Indians visiting the Shawnees “den[ied] they had brought either Scalps or Prisoners, the *Shawnanese* suspecting them, had the Curiosity to search their Bags, and finding two Scalps in them, that by the Softness of the Hair did not feel like *Indian* Scalps, they wash’d them clean, and found them to be the Scalps of some Christians.”⁵² As the science of race emerged in Europe, Indians were similarly reading meaning into observable bodily differences as a way to find order in an increasingly complicated world.

Another kind of racialism is evident outside of the Southeast in speeches made by Indians who, even though they did not call themselves “red people,” challenged European claims to power by asserting a racial identity. In the 1740s, an Iroquois speaker in council with the English emphasized Iroquois independence by highlighting the racial divide between Europeans and Indians: “The World at the first was made on the other Side of the Great Water different from what it is on this Side, as may be known from the different Colours of our Skin, and of our Flesh, and that which you call Justice may not be so amongst us; you have your Laws and Customs, and so have we.”⁵³ And in the 1750s, Indians began promoting pan-Indian

at Philadelphia, August 22, 1755; [Samuel Hazard, ed.], *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, 10 vols. (Philadelphia and Harrisburg, 1851–52), 6: 343, 589.

⁵⁰ S. Williams, *Adair’s History*, 1, 3.

⁵¹ Ludovic Grant to Governor Glen, July 22, 1754, in *DRIA 1754–1765*, 18.

⁵² This trader’s letter was read at a Treaty with the Six Nations at Philadelphia, July 1742, in Colden, *History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada*, 51.

⁵³ Canassatego, quoted in Colden, *History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada*, 125.

resistance by evoking racial ties, as when the Delawares and Shawnees appealed to the Iroquois to “take up the Hatchet against the White People, without distinction, for all their Skin was of one Colour and the Indians of a Nother, and if the Six Nations wou’d strike the French, they wou’d strike the English.”⁵⁴ Northeastern Indians may have been incorporating a concept Europeans introduced to them—that skin color was significant—or they came to this idea on their own.

Thus eighteenth-century Indians did use biology either to reveal identity or to build a common identity. However, most often, Indians used “red” and “white” for their rhetorical power as metaphors intended to capture the essence of social relationships. Closer examination of three contexts in which the Cherokeees placed themselves in a “red” category shows that the Cherokeees adopted color-based categories as a strategy to inform the English about social obligations. Two of these examples come from the trader Alexander Longe’s 1725 “Postscript.” In this document, neither Longe nor the Cherokee conjuror he spoke to referred to Indians as “red” explicitly, but the Cherokeees by implication fell into a “red” category. The third example comes from a 1730 Cherokee-English council held in London.

First, however, there is a complication that requires explanation. The Cherokee language has two red colors. *Agigage* is a bright red originating in the Cherokee word for blood. *Wodige*, which usually translates as “brown,” is a red-brown color derived from the Cherokee word for red paint, *wadi*, which was made out of red clay before the Cherokeees acquired vermilion in trade.⁵⁵ Interpreters might have translated either word into English as “red.” These two colors had strong associations because the Cherokeees used red-brown face paint to evoke the blood-red natural powers of the body. Anthropologist Raymond Fogelson depicted this connection as gendered: the face paint worn by warriors and associated with death complemented the menstrual blood and life-giving powers of women.⁵⁶ A mid-eighteenth-century dictionary, compiled by the German engineer of an English fort in Cherokee country, demonstrates the obscure boundary between *agigage* and *wodige*, between the social and the biological. “Indian” is given as “Wodikehe,” suggesting that the “red people” in council transcripts came from *wodige*, but the dictionary then translates “Wodikéhe” as “Indian, painted Man,” not “red man.”⁵⁷ The following three Cherokee examples invoke both *agigage* and *wodige*.

In the same year as the Taensas chief told his story about the white, red, and black men emerging from a cave, Longe interviewed a Cherokee “prist,” or conjuror, to gauge the Cherokeees’ receptivity to Christian missionaries. The

⁵⁴ [Hazard], *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, 7: 299.

⁵⁵ Janine Scancarelli, personal communication with the author, October 7, 1994. James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokeees*, Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report for 1897–98, no. 19 (Washington, D.C., 1900), 545. And also according to Mooney, red paint “in former days was procured from a deep red clay known as *ela-wa’ti*, or ‘reddish brown clay.’” See James Mooney, *The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokeees*, Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology (Washington, D.C., 1891), 378–79.

⁵⁶ Mooney, *Sacred Formulas*, 378–79; Raymond D. Fogelson, “On the ‘Petticoat Government’ of the Eighteenth-Century Cherokee,” *Personality and the Cultural Construction of Society*, David K. Jordan and Marc J. Swartz, eds. (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1990), 173–75.

⁵⁷ John Gerar William De Brahm, *Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America*, Louis De Vorse, Jr., ed. (Columbia, S.C., 1971), 122, 127.

conjurer answered Longe in much the same way as the Taensas chief, by telling an origin story. In the beginning, everything was water. The Great Man Above gave a crawfish some dirt to spread and then made the sun and moon. After he had made all living things, "he toke some white Clay and mead the white man and one white woman . . . and then he mead tow and Two of Evry nashun under the sone[,] woman and man[.] They have incized Ever since but I think that The english are the first that he mead because he has Indued them with knowledge of meaking all things."⁵⁸ Although it is left unsaid what color clay other nations were made from, Cherokee land, lying in what is now northeastern Georgia, eastern Tennessee, and the western Carolinas, is one of the regions in North America most noted for its extensive banks of red clay.

The conjurer told another story that positioned Indians as "red," but this time he linked skin color to the abstractly colored gods of the four directions. The god in the north was

a black god colored like the negro and he is verrie cross . . . [T]hat in the Est is the couler of us Indians and hee is something beter than the other [other sources call this god in the east red/*agigage*] . . . [H]e that is in the south is a verrie good one and white as yow English are, and soe mild that we love him out of meshor . . . [Y]ow are whiter Then all other nashons or people under the sun[.] [T]he grate king of heaven has given yow the knowledge of all things[.] Shurely he has a grater love for yow then us and for us then The negrows.

It was not until Longe pressed him for more information on the fourth god that the conjurer found a color for him. He was "the Colour of the spanards."⁵⁹ In other accounts of the gods of the four directions, his color would have been "blue," but "blue" men had no parallel in the nascent racial categories of the Southeast.

The conjurer's reluctance to take the story to its implausible conclusion, blue Spaniards, reveals the reason for his storytelling. Longe thought he was gathering information on Cherokee religious beliefs, but the conjurer was tailoring his story for his audience. The origin story was probably a fabrication, too, a familiar plot with additional expository details, most notably the idea that whites were created first. In both stories, the conjurer flattered Longe with deference to white superiority, but, when asked directly about whether the Cherokees would like missionaries to come among them, he expressed doubts about their efficacy, for "these white men that Lives amongsts us a traiding are more deboched and more wicked Then the beatest of our young felows[.] is itt nott a shame for Them that has such good prists and such knowledge as they have To be worse then the Indians that are In a maner but like wolves."⁶⁰ With these narratives, the conjurer intended to instruct Longe in how white people *should* behave.

In the third example, the 1730 treaty signing in London, the Cherokee speaker claimed the category "red" in yet another context. This treaty originated in the

⁵⁸ D. H. Corkran, ed., "A Small Postscript of the Ways and Maners [*sic*] of the Indians called Charikees," *Southern Indian Studies* 21 (1969): 27–29.

⁵⁹ Corkran, "Small Postscript," 14. An elderly Cherokee named Sicktower told John Howard Payne that the gods of the four directions were white, black, red, and blue; see Payne Papers, vol. 2, 110, Newberry Library, Chicago. James Mooney's late nineteenth-century collection of Cherokee sacred formulas shows that *agigage*, not *wodige*, dominated in Cherokee mythology and was the color meant by the "red" of the four directions. See Mooney, *Sacred Formulas*, 342, 346.

⁶⁰ Corkran, "Small Postscript," 21.

bizarre ambitions of an English eccentric, Sir Alexander Cuming, who on his own initiative visited the Cherokees and invited seven of them to London to meet the king (see frontispiece). When they got there, the seven Cherokees found themselves part of treaty negotiations in which the English speaker said that, since the Cherokees were “now the children of the Great King of Great Britain and he their father,” they “must be always ready at the Governor’s command to fight against any Nation whether they be white men or Indians who shall dare to molest or hurt the English.” The English also sought good trading relations, the return of escaped slaves, and legal jurisdiction in murders between Cherokees and colonists. To seal the terms of the treaty, the English distributed presents of guns, knives, kettles, wampum belts, and “a piece of Red Cloth.” The Cherokee speaker, overcome by the “glittering show of the courtiers,” acceded to these demands and said, “We look upon the Great King George as the Sun and as our Father and upon ourselves as his children[.] For tho’ we are red and you white yet our hands and hearts are join’d together. We came hither naked and poor, as the Worm of the Earth, but you have everything: and we that have nothing must love you.”⁶¹

In asserting a “red” identity, the Indian speaker at the 1730 London council treated “red” and “white” as moieties tying the Cherokees and English to an alliance in which each had a distinct, complementary role to play. During the ensuing decades, the Cherokees recalled the London treaty often to remind the English of the bargain they had made. As one Cherokee said at a 1757 council, “I remember my Father, King George, said, That the White People and we were equally his Children, And that both had an equal Right to the Land. Our Brothers, the White People, understanding making of Cloaths and other Necessaries for us, And we understood fighting; so if your People will furnish Cloaths and other Necessaries for us, We will assist you in defending the Country.”⁶²

If the Cherokees were extending their conception of town politics to explain each other’s role in the alliance, the English were metaphorically to assume the role of the civil or “white” chief and the Cherokees were to be the head warrior or “red” chief.⁶³ A “white” chief of a Cherokee town did not actually clothe his townspeople, but he did oversee communal resources and was responsible for the welfare of guests and town residents unable to fend for themselves. “White” chiefs also mediated and advocated peace. Although not truly seeking peace but control over who fought with whom, the English would have appeared on the ritual stage of diplomacy to be taking on the role of peacemakers.⁶⁴ Simultaneously, the Chero-

⁶¹ William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 10 vols. (Raleigh, N.C., 1886–90), 3: 130–33; “Alexander Cuming Journal,” in Samuel Cole Williams, ed., *Early Travels in the Tennessee Country, 1540–1800* (Johnson City, Tenn., 1928), 140; S. Williams, *Adair’s History*, 53. For more on Cuming’s tour through Cherokee country, see “Historical Relation of Facts Delivered by Ludovick Grant, Indian Trader, to His Excellency the Governor of South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 10 (1909): 54–68.

⁶² Waughaughy, Conference at Fort Frederick, in [Hazard], *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, 7: 555.

⁶³ For more on eighteenth-century Cherokee leadership, see Fred Gearing, *Priests and Warriors: Social Structures for Cherokee Politics in the 18th Century*, American Anthropological Association Memoir 93 (October 1962); M. Thomas Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of Revolution* (New York, 1993).

⁶⁴ Besides the 1725–1726 councils mentioned previously, see that described in Langdon Cheves, ed., “A Letter from Carolina in 1715, and Journal of the March of the Carolinians into the Cherokee

kees derided the English ability to make war.⁶⁵ These metaphorical positions of English/white/peace and Cherokee/red/war found confirmation in the kin terms used to explain the Cherokee-English alliance. The Cherokees willingly became “younger brothers” to English colonial governors and “children” of the English king. Within Cherokee society, “white” already had associations with old and “red” with young, as in the age structure of Cherokee politics: civil chiefs were usually a generation older than war chiefs.⁶⁶

The variety of contexts in which the Cherokees situated themselves as “red” shows that “red” did not have a definite, fixed meaning. In one context, it meant the war moiety, in another there was a hint of origins in red clay, and in a third situation, the “red” god of the east was ranked second but otherwise lacked characteristics. Whether the Cherokees meant “red people” or “painted people” is equally ambiguous. The war moiety involved both red colors. (*Wodige* paint symbolized *agigage* activities.) The god of the east was the color of *agigage*, while origins in red clay would make one the color of *wodige*. If the Cherokees had a “red” identity in 1725–1730, it was just emerging.

Most significant, these three examples show that the Cherokees became “red” as a consequence of trying to define “whiteness.” In contrast to the vagueness and contextuality of what it meant to be “red,” all three examples give the same understanding of “white.” In the two stories told by the Cherokee conjuror, whites were ranked first because they had the “knowledge of meaking all things.” Indians were ranked second. The Cherokees also accepted this ranking at the London treaty council when they allied with the English in exchange for trade goods. Superior wealth and technology justified European claims to the high-status category of “white.” Presumably, it was blacks’ status as slaves that relegated them to the lowest rank. The Taensas story about the three races leaving the cave used the same ranking based on wealth (the white man “took the good road that led him into a fine hunting ground”) and similarly grounded this ranking in an age hierarchy: the white man was the first to leave the cave. This deference to white superiority was a diplomatic pose, for among themselves the Cherokees said very different things about white people, calling them “the white nothings,” “the ugly white people,” and “white dung-hill fowls.”⁶⁷

THUS, IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, the Cherokees elaborated on their own color symbolism to create a set of categories to stand for their diplomatic relationship with the English. The rhetorical purpose of color-based categories became even more transparent after the Revolutionary War, when the Cherokees

Mountains, in the Yemassee Indian War, 1715–16, From the Original Ms.,” in *Year Book—1894, City of Charleston, South Carolina* (Charleston, 1894), 314–54.

⁶⁵ S. Williams, *Adair’s History*, 463; Charles Town Council, January 24, 1726/7, British Public Record Office, C.O. 5.387.237, in Anderson and Lewis, *Guide to Cherokee Records in Foreign Archives*.

⁶⁶ Payne Papers, 3: 65; Gearing, *Priests and Warriors*; Raymond D. Fogelson, “The Cherokee Ballgame Cycle: An Ethnographer’s View,” *Ethnomusicology* 15 (1971): 327–39; and Fogelson, “Cherokee Notions of Power,” in *The Anthropology of Power: Ethnographic Studies from Asia, Oceania, and the New World*, Fogelson and Richard N. Adams, eds. (New York, 1977), 185–94.

⁶⁷ S. Williams, *Adair’s History*, 97, 115, 242, 263.

rejected the former meanings of “red” and “white” and attempted to negotiate new meanings to counter American assumptions of conquest. As in the early eighteenth century, Cherokee speakers used their origin story as a base to explain social positioning, but they recast the origin story to assert precedence. At the 1785 treaty council at Hopewell, Cherokee chief Old Tassel said, “I am made of this earth, on which the great man above placed me, to possess it . . . You must know the red people are the aborigines of this land, and that it is but a few years since the white people found it out. I am of the first stock, as the commissioners know, and a native of this land; and the white people are now living on it as our friends.”⁶⁸

Old Tassel’s reminder to U.S. treaty commissioners that the “red people” were the original occupants of the land constituted a Cherokee challenge to U.S. hegemony that endured into the 1790s and early 1800s. After complaining in 1792 that “we are bound up all round with white people, that we have not room to hunt,” the Little Nephew said, “though we are red, you must know one person made us both. The red people were made first . . . Our great father above made us both; and, if he was to take it into his head that the whites had injured the reds, he would certainly punish them for it.”⁶⁹ In the 1790s, another Cherokee told some missionaries, “The Great Father of all breathing things, in the beginning created all men, the white, the red and the black . . . The whites are now called the older brothers and the red the younger. I do not object to this and will call them so though really the naming should have been reversed, for the red people dwelt here first.”⁷⁰ And in the 1830s, a Cherokee man told of how God had made the first man out of red clay. Because Indians were red, they had obviously been made first: “The Red people therefore are the real people, as their name *yuwiya*, indicates.”⁷¹ Thus, after the revolution, the Cherokees abandoned the mutually agreed-upon racial hierarchy that had granted whites a higher status in exchange for trade goods. Emphasizing their age and precedence as a people, they defined “red” differently to neutralize the hierarchy Americans thought they had inherited from Britain.

Cherokee insistence that the red people were made first was partly a response to how whites regarded them. At Hopewell, U.S. treaty commissioners claimed that they only wanted to make the Cherokees happy, “regardless of any distinction of color, or of any difference in our customs, our manners, or particular situation.”⁷² The Cherokees were skeptical. One Cherokee complained to Moravian missionaries in the 1790s, “but many people think that we Indians are too evil and bad to become good people, and that we are too unclean and brown [probably *wodige*].”⁷³ The Cherokees saw that skin-color categories had become the predominant

⁶⁸ United States, *American State Papers, Indian Affairs* (hereafter, *ASP*), 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1832), 1: 41.

⁶⁹ *ASP*, 1: 288.

⁷⁰ “Report of the Journey of the Brethren Abraham Steiner and Frederick C. De Schweinitz to the Cherokees and the Cumberland Settlements (1799),” in S. Williams, *Early Travels in Tennessee Country*, 496–97.

⁷¹ Nutsawi of Pinelog, *Payne Papers*, 4: 572. At about the same time, a Cherokee who had migrated to the west (Arkansas) told another missionary that the “first human pair were red” and then proceeded to give the story of Adam and Eve. Cephas Washburn, *Reminiscences of the Indians*, J. W. Moore, ed. (Richmond, 1869), 155.

⁷² *ASP*, 1: 40.

⁷³ “Report of the Journey of . . . Steiner and Schweinitz,” 488.

indicator of status in the American South, and “black” labor and “red” land the two most marketable commodities. English trade goods justified the Cherokees’ deference in the early eighteenth century, but now they were unlikely to gain anything in a racial hierarchy that was pushing the category “red” closer to the category “black.”

The wordplay and invention surrounding Cherokee uses of “red” and “white” give the illusion of complete plasticity, but it was only the meanings of “red” and “white” that changed with the situation. The Cherokees never claimed to be any other color than “red,” and the English, even when being insulted, were always “white.” By the end of the century, the color-based categories that grew out of Cherokee color symbolism had become racial categories because the Cherokees described the origins of difference as being innate, the product of separate creations, and they spoke of skin color as if it were a meaningful index of difference. But they persistently molded what race meant to fit particular contexts.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY INDIANS AND EUROPEANS were engaged in the same mental processes. They experimented with notions of biological difference in an attempt to develop methods for discerning individual allegiances. They adapted origin beliefs to come up with divine explanations for political, cultural, and social divisions. They dealt with the sudden diversity of people by creating new knowledge out of old knowledge, new color-based categories derived from their traditional color symbolism. Thus the Cherokee conjuror in Longe’s account and Linnaeus were compatriots in the same intellectual enterprise. The two groups also spent most of the eighteenth century expressing confusion and disagreement about the origins of human difference, the significance of bodily variation, and how and why God, or the Great Man Above, had created such different people. It would take another century for the science of race to reach its full height and then one more century for the idea of race to be seriously questioned. Perhaps we are now at the brink of the apocalypse, when the idea of race will be abandoned entirely and another system of categories will emerge to take its place.

In the meantime, “red” continues to be contested. Indians may have named themselves “red,” but they could not prevent whites from making it a derogatory term. By the nineteenth century, whites had appropriated “red man” and put it to their own uses. Appearing in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, captivity narratives, and dime novels, ultimately to be taken up by tobacco advertisers and national sports teams, the noble “Red Man” and the brutal “Redskin” evolved into demeaning and dehumanizing racial epithets. But, at the same time, Indians could always use “red” to claim a positive identity and to make a statement about difference, to build pan-Indian alliances as in the native women’s organization Women of All Red Nations, or to articulate American Indian grievances as in Vine Deloria, Jr.’s critique of Euroamerican ethnocentrism, *God Is Red* (1973).

The adaptability of racial categories to fit particular political and social alignments illuminates critical features of the idea of race in general. People do not believe in race abstractly but instead manipulate racial categories to suit contextu-

alized objectives. Yet scholars seeking to understand race as a cultural construction should exercise care not to dismiss physical differences between peoples as pure figments of imagination. Why did Indians begin to see in skin color the potential for categorizing themselves, Europeans, and Africans but not use skin color to distinguish among Indians? Is it because there was indeed greater observable, biological difference between the peoples of Europe, Africa, and America than among them? There are physical differences; our collective imaginations organize these differences to make meaning of them and are constantly at work altering those meanings.

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