

1995

False Lips and a Naughty Tongue: Rumors and 18th Century Native Americans

Victoria Eileen Kane
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Indigenous Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kane, Victoria Eileen, "False Lips and a Naughty Tongue: Rumors and 18th Century Native Americans" (1995). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1539625992.

<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-pkar-b819>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

FALSE LIPS AND A NAUGHTY TONGUE
Rumors and 18th Century Native Americans

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Victoria Kane

1995

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Victoria Kane
Author

Approved, August 1995

James Axtell
James Axtell

John Selby
John Selby

James Whittenburg
James Whittenburg

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memories
of
Stanley Dziurzynski and Raymond Kane

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	2
CHAPTER I. ORAL AND LITERATE CULTURES: THE CLASH OF SOUND AND SIGHT.....	6
CHAPTER II. RUMOR: THE CROSSROAD OF ORAL-LITERATE CONTACT.....	22
CHAPTER III. THEY ARE OFTEN COMING HERE WITH TALK: RUMOR AS OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN NATIVES AND COLONISTS.....	33
CHAPTER IV. PRIVATE INTEREST RUMORS: TRADERS, INTERPRETERS, AND SLAVES AMONG THE CREEKS AND CHEROKEES.....	49
CHAPTER V. THE FINAL WORD.....	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to thank Professor James Axtell for encouraging and believing in a study that others found far-fetched. The writer also wishes to thank Professor John Selby and Professor James Whittenburg for their time in reading and critiquing the manuscript.

Dr. Nancy Fix Anderson, Dr. Mark Fernandez, and Dr. David Moore provided the encouragement and advice that every graduate student should be lucky enough to receive. No one could ask for finer historians, mentors, and friends.

Finally, the writer thanks Mary, Ray, and Tim Kane, as well as other friends and family, who lived through a year of late night phone calls, caffeine addiction, and stress-filled holidays.

ABSTRACT

After arriving in North America, the Europeans quickly realized that the key to conquering the continent rested in relations with the Native Americans. If the natives were befriended, military alliances and trading partnerships could be created and maintained. The colonists, however, had to hurdle language differences with their neighbors if these dreams were to produce the desired riches. Colonists who learned native languages found an advantage with the natives. This advantage later drove colonial conquests of native land and lives.

Native-colonial relations were particularly precarious in the Southeast, where Cherokees, Creeks, and other tribes from Virginia to Georgia occupied prime land for trade and agriculture; the natives also provided a buffer between the English, French, and Spanish. One method of winning the natives' allegiance was for the colonists to learn native languages and infiltrate the villages. Quickly, the colonists discovered the rapid dissemination and careful consideration of all speeches in an oral society. The natives had no written standards of truth in their culture; they relied on "talks" for all of their communication. Even unverifiable rumors were contemplated for any grain of truth that may have been important to the tribe. Colonists eventually turned rumors into opportunity--a chance to spread stories through the villages that worked for the benefit of colonial conquest.

While the natives were aware of the colonists' rumor-spreading, they were almost helpless to stop it. As more and more colonists came into contact with the natives, the large number of stories spread through native communication channels were almost impossible to control or verify. The rumors allowed colonists to divide the natives and assume control of their land. By the late eighteenth century, natives were choking on the "talk" of colonists.

FALSE LIPS AND A NAUGHTY TONGUE

Rumors and 18th Century Native Americans

INTRODUCTION

The Sound of another Man's Fame is so grating to some Men's Ears and so unpleasing to their Humours; that they will put their Inoculations to the Stretch and leave no Strategem untried that may either lessen or destroy it, to effect which even surmise or Suspicion are called Facts, and as such industriously spread abroad with loud Clamour whilst the World, fond of having its Appetite to Defamation indulged, receives for granted what few give themselves the Pain or Trouble to enquire the Foundation of, and thus the innocent Man's Reputation may fall Sacrifice to false Lips and a naughty Tongue which like Arrows, that fly in the Dark, no man upon the Face of the Earth can possibly guard against.¹

The land yielded to plows and hoes, and even the ravages of weather created stronger, tenacious characters. European settlers to North America found the proverbial "clean slate," a place to create new lives in the form and direction that the settlers desired. Through the trees and across the fields, however, watched a force that could halt the colonists' progress. They had arrows and soon guns and horses. Their most dangerous weapon was voice, the ability to spread words and stories about the newcomers. The struggle for North America hinged on the relationship between the colonial drive for progress and the native fight for stability.

In the southern colonies, from Virginia to the Georgia-Florida border, relations were particularly precarious between the colonists and natives. Geography played a factor in this delicate relationship. Through much of the early eighteenth century, natives were pushed out of coastal areas and into the backcountry. One of the largest tribes was the Cherokee. By 1715, the Cherokees established sixty towns with a total population of just over eleven thousand.² The Cherokees occupied land in North and South Carolina, as well as territory in parts of Tennessee and southwestern Virginia. Although this nation was

¹Appendix to the Journal and Proceedings of Thomas Bosomworth in *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, May 21, 1750-August 7, 1754*, ed. William L. McDowell, Jr. (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1958), (DRIA, I), 327.

²Tom Hatley. *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of Revolution*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.

relatively unknown in the early eighteenth century, the Cherokees came to the colonists' attention after the Yamassee War in 1715 and as French accounts leaked out about native disruption of trade. The second major group of natives was the Creek, who occupied land in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida divided between two groups of towns. The Lower Creeks settled around the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers and the Upper Creeks formed towns near the Alabama, Coosa, and Tallapoosa Rivers.³ The Creeks were generally not considered "civilized" and were viewed as treacherous because of their alternating loyalty to the English, French, and Spanish.

The Cherokees and Creeks formed a chain down the southern colonies' spine and, as such, acted as a buffer between the competing European claims to land. The natives formed a core surrounded by the English to the east, the French to the west, and the Spanish to the south. The Europeans viewed the natives' territory as a "no man's land," land that needed to be taken before a rival power could claim it. With each new settler, the natives found their land being encroached upon and greater competition among the Europeans to take whatever the Cherokees and Creeks had left. While acting as a buffer, the natives also stood in the way of continued expansion.

The battle for land was compounded by increasing communication between natives and colonists. On the one hand, colonial governments sent agents and officials into the backcountry to deliver controlled and scripted speeches to the natives. Words were calculated for desired effect. Yet a great deal of communication was uncontrollable because it was private. Traders, missionaries, and private citizens talked to the natives, making promises and predictions that led to tensions between colonial officials and natives.

³ J. Leitch Wright, Jr. *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 6.

Uncontrolled speech, coupled with greed for land, insured tense relations and outbursts of hostility between Cherokees, Creeks, and colonists.

Words, however, were the key to a successful native-colonial relationship. The party holding the upper hand in the communication struggle held the ultimate power in the relationship. Although the presence of different languages caused substantial difficulties in communicating, the foundation of the struggle was each society's different basis for communication. The Cherokees and Creeks lived in an oral world, where sound was a primary, living means of expression. Words were powerful, with the ability to help or harm, as in charms, hexes, and curses.⁴ The colonists relied on written expression, trusting visual proof over all other senses. Written words were concrete, undeniable proof of existence. When the oral and visual worlds met, cacophony resulted. To the natives, written words enabled men to "read minds at a distance and foretell the future."⁵ The words were also dangerous, bringing evil and death to native people.⁶ The colonists considered merely spoken words unreliable and unbelievable. Native speeches were dismissed as "falsehoods" and "lies" and oral ceremonies were viewed with contempt.⁷ Each society did not entirely trust the other's form of communication, but was forced to compromise for the sake of a successful relationship.

By the early eighteenth century, as the race for empire was accelerating in North America, the colonists found an opportunity to turn language differences into an advantage over the natives. Europeans who had infiltrated native society, such as Jesuit missionaries

⁴James Axtell. "The Power of Print in the Eastern Woodlands," *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 92.

⁵Axtell, *After Columbus*, 93.

⁶*Ibid.*, 91.

⁷Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 12.

in Canada, were usually more successful than those who remained culturally inflexible.⁸ Colonists gained native trust in order to join the oral network linking village to village. As part of the native oral network, colonists could indiscriminately add to the stories and speeches circulating through the villages, using spoken words to advance their own goals. Private rumors had always been a part of native channels, but now unsubstantiated stories were given official sanction. These rumors abused the native network by overloading the channels with false and contradicting stories. Without a reliable means of sorting truth from falsehoods, the Cherokees and Creeks fell prey to lies and the maneuvers of the colonists.

The lust for land drove Europeans to do anything to outsmart their opponents. The natives stood in the way of complete control and needed to be moved out of the way. Colonial ignorance of natives allowed the tribes to continue their independent existences. But gaining access to the native communication networks gave colonists an advantage in their efforts to subjugate the natives. The Cherokees and Creeks understood some of the dishonesty propagated by the colonists, but by then it was too late. The natives could lose land and still exist as one people; manipulation of their values and social ties weakened their bonds and strengthened the colonial drive to conquer the continent. The Cherokees and Creeks had no weapon against the "false lips and naughty tongues" of their neighbors.

⁸Axtell, *After Columbus*, 98.

CHAPTER I
ORAL AND LITERATE CULTURES:
THE CLASH OF SOUND AND SIGHT

Two cultures, thrust together on a stage with no script or direction, have problems beyond who says which line and where the spotlight should shine. The fundamental difficulty of communicating during intercultural contact lies deeper than differences in language and speech. The basic struggle reduces to differences in thought processes. Language and speech incompletely reproduce mental activity. Two separate languages or means of expression potentially communicate different values and mindsets. Cultural understanding requires the discovery of these values and their effects on language and communication.

But, such understanding is often forgone. Forcing language on another culture is easier than learning how that culture thinks and expresses itself. As a result, resentment brews and misunderstandings proliferate. This is a particular problem for contact between oral and literate cultures, where the literates usually try to force the written word on the oral society. Yet, in an exchange starved for clear communication, any piece of information is gobbled up in the hope of demystifying or controlling the other group.

In oral-literate cultural contact, rumor provides desired information as well as stimulating confusion and false impressions. For the oral culture, rumor supplies a form of mass communication. Any news comes from word-of-mouth transfer of stories. Literate cultures, however, often view rumor as marginal truth. Between natives and Euro-Americans, their opposing communication styles allowed rumor to manipulate the relationship.

Rhetoric composed one of native society's cultural foundations, a never-ending verbal "contest of wits."¹ Thought thrived as verbal expression, otherwise dying in the recesses of the mind. The need to construct thoughts for an oral medium produced distinct qualities of expression, shaping the society's overall structure and values.

First, native expression was additive and aggregative.² Speech existed as a constant flowing of information, constructed verbally with the word 'and' between thoughts. Thought was not compartmentalized into individual, isolated entities, but laid on a continuum dependent on information preceding and following to make sense. Cherokee talks to English officials contained a distinct past-present-future framework. The beginning of the speech summarized past talks and promises. The bulk of the speech, in the middle, discussed matters of present concern. The end of a Cherokee talk typically stated promises and requests for the future. Second, oral expression tended towards redundancy and conservatism.³ Formulas and patterns simplified oral communication, clustering thought into a comprehensible and whole being. Continual use of key phrases and rhythms aided the memory. For example, the Cherokees referred to the ruler of England as "the King over the Great Water," rather than naming a specific individual. Furthermore, information about the past accorded respect and protection. For example, natives revered the wise men and women of the tribe or clan, who kept the memory and life of the oral society. Finally, native expression was largely human-centered.⁴ Human activity in the present constituted the focus of most speeches. Memories no longer possessing any relevance were cast aside for more important thoughts. Direct actions and their consequences were much easier to

¹Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. (New York: Methuen, 1982), 68.

²*Ibid.*, 37-39.

³*Ibid.*, 39, 41.

⁴*Ibid.*, 42.

remember and express than abstract thoughts. The native-oral mind preferred dealing with present activity, expressing it in familiar phrases and patterns.

The structure of communication affects the content of expression. Through the structure and content of expression, a society reveals what it considers important and primary to its identity. A native-oral society's reliance on sound had a particularly marked effect on perceptions of the past and the role of people in society. Sound stood as a current event establishing relationships and connections between people.⁵ Verbal expression established and strengthened group identity. Native-oral society's survival hinged on thought's presence as verbal expression before a public audience; the society could not survive by reading minds. Much of the native fascination with writing centered on its ability to "read minds at a distance."⁶ In an oral society, if thought was not spoken, it was not known. Sound as a current event made human activity a central focus; an individual's actions could influence the society as a whole. Furthermore, the expression of current human activity was conceived as an utterance of truth.⁷ When Atahualpa, an Inca emperor, was ordered by Pizarro to submit to the authority of the Bible,

The Inca took the book, examined it with care, held it to his ear, and then said to the monk: 'I have looked at your *quipus* and seen nothing; I have held it to my ear and heard nothing; if the truth is written in it, why does God not give me the grace to read, as he does to you, who are nothing but an upstart, come from afar to murder my people and pillage my realms?'⁸

Vocalizing man's actions established his relationship not only to society but to the rest of nature.

⁵Walter J. Ong. *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 122-123.

⁶Axtell, *After Columbus*, 86.

⁷Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 33.

⁸William Bright. *American Indian Linguistics and Literature*. (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 154-155.

In a human-centered, present-minded native society, no past or 'history' exists as defined by the modern standards of the words.⁹ No written records verified what occurred before; group memory held the only records. In native-oral society, the past meshed with the present in speech. The past did not die, but received life in each oral storytelling. Nothing separated past and present--both mixed together into one life and expression. Of course, most details of the past could become blurred over time, with "facts" assuming the character of myth rather than history. In a native-oral culture, however, "history" endured as a present reality, not a catalogue of facts.

The value of the past related to the past's status in a native-oral society's collective memory. Oral memory was not verbatim. Rather, mnemonic devices took care of the details, so that ideas and themes could be expounded upon. Words did not exist as tools for recall, but as celebrations of achievement and triumph over adversity.¹⁰ Words described the formation of native society and its endurance within nature. Sound was a connection to and verification of the society's existence. In modern literate societies, the closest approximation is the respect showered on written documents serving as the foundations of governments, institutions, and families. The protection given to the United States' Constitution, birth certificates, and organizational charters reflects this respect. In a native-oral culture, past and present meshed, with respect shown to the foundation of previous events and achievements.

A native-oral culture's thought and communication styles closely connect. Verbal and mental activities express one another.¹¹ The mechanics of communication in a native-

⁹Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 23.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34.

oral culture offer a glimpse of the society's mindsets, as well as the limits and expectations particular to the people.

Learning to communicate in a native-oral culture centered on an apprenticeship.¹² The apprenticeship required mastering thought patterns and combining and recombining proverbs and epithets. Wise men and women stressed the expression of concrete action and interaction within the society and nature. Themes linked in recognizable patterns underpinned oral expression.¹³ Memory had a limited capacity, requiring that "knowledge be relatively rigid or typical. Not only do formulas abound but characters themselves become types."¹⁴ An apprenticeship also taught the ceremonies surrounding speech. Sound communication demanded alertness and commitment from the listener.¹⁵ Each speaker had a turn, while everyone else listened in solemn silence. Skiagunsta, a Cherokee chief, explained to Governor Glen of South Carolina during a July 1753 meeting, "it is not our Custom like the White People to talk altogether, but when one is done another begins."¹⁶ Words were not to be freely spoken or listened to. Some natives accused one another of speaking and listening too freely. Old Hopp, a Cherokee chief, was accused of being "an old fool...he would hear anybody that brought him a small string of beads."¹⁷ However, those natives who mastered communication often assumed leadership roles; superior speaking ability was considered a necessary attribute of a native leader's character.

Assuming the connection of past and present in oral culture, formulaic treatment of expression and thought left potential for assumptions about an individual's character and

¹²*ibid.*, 9.

¹³Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 84.

¹⁴*ibid.*, 30-31.

¹⁵Axtell, *After Columbus*, 92.

¹⁶*DRIA*, I, 441.

¹⁷Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 11.

intentions. An individual or event could be judged according to similar, but unrelated, situations from another time. According to the views of oral culture, where past and present become one, it only made sense for something to behave as it did before. Yet such assumptions had potentially dangerous repercussions for the oral culture and those who come into contact with it. The natives consistently made value judgments about Euro-Americans based on past encounters with 'white men,' often overlooking differences in character or situation.

By modern literate society's standards, the memory capabilities of an oral society approached nearly phenomenal dimensions. Native-oral culture handled the problem of retaining and retrieving large amounts of information by devising mnemonic patterns, such as repetition, antithesis, alliteration, assonance, standard settings, and familiar proverbs.¹⁸ Some native-oral cultures used a variety of visual memory aides--monuments, totem designs, pictography, and wampum belts. These marks did not "encode" information for recall; they only triggered the release of material already held in the memory.¹⁹

In native-oral speech and thought, there was a striving for balance and symmetry.²⁰ The rhythm of balanced speech extended to body movements, thus the dancing and swaying that typically accompanied oral storytelling. Euro-Americans acting as translators among the natives found that knowing the language was not enough--they also needed expertise with manners of speech and delivery to insure complete translation.²¹ While Euro-Americans viewed these actions as frivolous ritual, natives considered the ceremonies an integral component of speech. Many natives expected an exchange of "presents" when

¹⁸Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34.

¹⁹Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 35.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 30.

²¹Nancy L. Hagedorn. "A Friend to Go Between Them: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker during Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-70." *Ethnohistory*. 35:1 (Winter 1988), 66.

speaking with English officials, even if the English were unprepared for such demands. In a native society, communication relied on sound, but also on complementary actions. Communication was "an interplay of ear and eye, of audience and performer."²²

In native-oral cultures, sound contained a recognized and respected force. The spoken word possessed a "magical potency."²³ The force grew from the origins of the word as a projection driven by power from the human body. Native-oral people believed they possessed power over things they named because the spoken name itself held great energy. For an oral expression to occur, mind, body, and spirit had to join forces--sound was not an experience relegated to only one of the senses. The mere existence of sound gave it a total presence. Native-oral cultures considered that presence nature's magical and driving force.

In a native-oral culture, sound's greatest power was establishing a present reality.²⁴ While the most evanescent of sensuous experiences, sound was also one of the most existential. It determined current reality by "emanating from a source here and now discernibly active, with the result that involvement with sound is involvement with the present, with here and now existence and activity."²⁵ Silence represented the past and the future. Sound, however, did not create a record.²⁶ For native-oral people, sound was an actual event, not a notation of a past occurrence. Word as sound established reality, but transcended strict definitions of time and space.

²² Paul G. Zolbrod. *Reading the Voice: Native American Oral Poetry on the Page*. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995), 47.

²³Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 32.

²⁴Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 113.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 111-112.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 22.

In terms of human relationships, sound became the unifying principle of a native-oral society.²⁷ Sound emanated from humans, was comprehended by humans, and connected humans. As a result, individuals joined together in groups and, on a larger scale, a society. The utterance of words insured survival; no society survived long in silence. Sound created the relationships most humans sought, satisfying a need for companionship and identity. Sound in a native-oral culture was also connected intimately to action. A word was sound heard, not a figure observed. Words were events and actions because they relied on sound for existence.²⁸ Words embodied in sound were direct moves and actions.

Sound also had the potential for harm within a native-oral culture. As an active, present reality, word as sound "could be used to achieve an effect such as weapons or tools could achieve."²⁹ In many native-oral cultures, saying something evil about another was believed to bring direct physical harm. Chanted curses and hateful utterances held the magic that oral societies believed words possessed. While members of a native-oral society believed in sound's potential as a weapon, orality also inflicted harm on the society. Studies reveal that many native-oral societies "manifest characteristic anxiety syndromes" directly related to reliance on oral communication.³⁰ Sound heralded a world populated by voices, people, and beings that were unpredictable and yet concrete. Suddenly, the world grew into a much larger and frightening place. As with many things, sound had a negative flip side, one that terrorized the very world it created.

²⁷Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 72.

²⁸Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 112-113.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 113.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 131.

The reliance on sound in an oral culture did not negate the use of script or visual-based communication. Visual-based communication did not encode and structure information, but aided in its release from the memory. Some natives went beyond memory aides and composed a written language. The Cherokees possessed a ninety-six character syllabary that could only be translated by certain scribes and was not readable by Euro-Americans or enemy tribes. The syllabary was publicly known since 1795 and its existence was originally scoffed at by many members of Euro-American society.³¹ Because the syllabary did not correspond to the Roman alphabet, the Americans and Europeans did not consider it real. The Cherokees were deemed intellectually inferior because they were an oral society. Public notice of the language may have been relatively late in the eighteenth century, but existence of the syllabary suggests the advanced level of Cherokee orality.

Sound and writing are not mutually exclusive since script developed around 3500 B.C. Many oral cultures have had some form of written or drawn notation. However, a shift from sound to sight did lead to distinct differences in thought and communication processes.

Literate culture required a more secure sense of order and control because an alphabet or set of characters immediately placed a limit on the otherwise limitless bounds of the imagination.³² Grammar, and to a certain degree etiquette, enforced rules and form on expression. A writing surface's size alone ordered and controlled words. The limits of written expression exceeded those of oral communication, which was only limited by the

³¹Traveller Bird. Tell Them They Lie: The Sequoyah Myth. (Los Angeles: Westernlore Publishers, 1971), 13, 23.

³²Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 45.

speaker's own deficiencies. Giving words an external, visual appearance demanded the careful following of rules and awareness of limits.

Literate culture also ushered in new respect for literal meaning. A visually oriented culture "which puts a premium on...qualities such as sharp outline and clear-cut sequence, is likely to regard the literal meaning, in the sense of plain or definite meaning, as something altogether wholesome and desirable, and to regard other remote, perhaps more profoundly symbolic, meanings with disfavor."³³ The most direct meaning was the most desired. The shift from ideas to details was not altogether surprising because the eye is basically a lazy organ. It does not want to wander all over a page hunting for a meaning and becomes easily taxed after continual use. The literal and the definite acquired a new prominence in a literate culture.

The foundation of literate culture was the written (versus the spoken) word. But the significance of the written word's appearance went beyond its physical or visual presence. The written word had an entirely different perspective and function from the spoken word. In time, emphasis on the visual produced mental structures and processes diametrically opposed to those in oral culture.

The most obvious change was from sound to sight. Written words had an attachment to space outside the human body. Experiencing the written word did not involve an interaction of mind, body, and spirit, just of the mind and eyes. The mind was merely observing, somewhat like a Lockean *camera obscura*.³⁴ Communication was not as sensuous an experience, another indication of the order and structure that a literate culture

³³Ibid., 47.

³⁴Ibid., 66.

introduced. Expression, using words, was based on observation rather than the presentation of an actual event.

The written word also created an environment structured on isolation and individualism. Quite simply, "writing and print isolate."³⁵ In the process of writing, the individual was the only actor, left alone with his thoughts. The popularity of diaries in the eighteenth century clearly illustrated the lone writer mixing observations of life with personal commentary and questions. In writing, "the individual first becomes aware of himself as capable of thinking for himself."³⁶ With the advent of this independence, the individual became paramount and the networks sound once brought together broke down. Ironically, these networks had been the channels of communication in native-oral culture. "Writing and print created the isolated thinker, the man with the book, and downgraded the network of personal loyalties which oral culture favor as matrices of communication and as principles of social unity."³⁷

Although components of two different communication styles, sound and writing did interact frequently. Positive and negative repercussions resulted from the interaction. The struggle between sound and writing represented the larger struggle between oral and literate cultures. Each society considered its form of communication the best expression, often ignoring the existence of an interdependent relationship.

Words occurred primarily as sound phenomena.³⁸ Writing provided visual representation of those phenomena. Therefore, writing had a dependence on sound. For a word to have written meaning, it continued to exist as an event or an oral expression.³⁹

³⁵Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 44.

³⁶Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 134.

³⁷*ibid.*, 54.

³⁸*ibid.*, 18.

³⁹*ibid.*, 32-33.

Literature was criticized by some experts as an obstacle to understanding what was primarily oral expression.

Yet, literate cultures considered written words superior to the "primitive" ways of sound. Literate cultures associated reliance on oral expression with "primitive" tribes and "savages." Jesuit missionaries among natives believed that "the Scripture does not vary like the oral words of man, who is almost by nature false."⁴⁰ Literature, by contrast, bore the mark of civilized man. By the same token, oral cultures considered literate cultures closed and unaware of the truth found in nature. To oral cultures, written words meant nothing more than marks on paper or in the dirt. Skiaguinta explained to Governor Glen, "my tongue is my Pen and my mouth my paper. When I look upon writing I am as if I were blind and in the Dark."⁴¹ Writing did not command action or speak of present reality. Natives originally conceived the writing of Euro-Americans as a means to read the minds of those far away, rather than words having any meaning or direction in themselves. Of course, each society chose to adapt some of the communication style of the other for profit or an easing of tension. But, underneath the acquisition of this new knowledge remained the values and mindset of an opposing system. These values and mindset were much more difficult to change or erase.

A meeting of oral and literate cultures more likely produced cacophony than a symphony. One English official on the frontier summed up the potential for conflict when he said, "the red men do not understand the written talks of the white men. Even so, the

⁴⁰Axtell, *After Columbus*, 96.

⁴¹*DRIA*, I, 164.

white men do not understand the belts of the red men."⁴² From the beginning, basic differences made oral-literate interaction difficult at best.

First, common problems in any communication exchange created stumbling blocks. Individuals communicate with their images of another.⁴³ Images form after assigning a larger group identification to a person or thing. Identification derives from sex, age, race, or any other unifying principle. The identification, therefore, becomes the "reference group."⁴⁴ Problems arise when it is difficult to determine an individual's primary reference group. For example, should natives be considered Indians, Cherokees, or savages? Conversely, are traders white men, Englishmen, or thieves? Even if reference groups are determined, no structure exists to provide easy communication between the two groups. Communication style A plus communication style B does not necessarily lead to a combination of A and B; more likely, an entirely new communication style C needs to be created.⁴⁵ Oral and literate cultures constituted polar opposites in the range of communication options.

A more philosophical debate between oral and literate cultures concerns the internal versus external roles of communication and man's role in nature. Whereas sound is an internalizing sensation drawing man into nature, sight "situates the observer outside what he views."⁴⁶ In an oral culture, communication is a ritualistic event and performance. Native cultures believed key rituals to be an integral part of their conversations with the Euro-Americans, even though the literate Euro-Americans found these ceremonies "tedious

⁴²John P. Brown, Old Frontiers: The Story of the Cherokee Indians from Earliest Times to the Date of Their Removal to the West, 1838. (Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, Inc., 1938), 146.

⁴³John C. Condon and Faithi S. Yousef. An Introduction to Intercultural Communication. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1975), 5.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁶Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 72.

and fatiguing."⁴⁷ Ignoring the rituals meant the abrupt end of any conversations with the native-oral societies. Literate cultures, however, made man "a kind of stranger, a spectator and manipulator in the universe rather than a participator."⁴⁸ A literate individual's words only fill pages of paper, dependent on the reaction of the reader to become a living command or direction. The internal-external conflict is not just a problem of communication, but also has a direct impact on the societies' worldviews and relationships with fellow humans. Why people communicate can be just as important as how they choose to express themselves. If the oral or literate culture cannot understand the other's purposes for communicating, any exchange of words remained an empty transaction.

A third conflict concerns the role of the individual versus the group in communication. Writing is an individual process, while speaking is group-oriented. Writing gives an individual "relative independence of the tribe."⁴⁹ In any communication between the cultures, whom does one address--a single leader, a council, or the population in its entirety? At the same time, who has the right to express himself? Individuals of a literate culture may not have patience with an oral society's proclivity for sharing information and performing. Meanwhile, oral cultures may be "suspicious of literates as slickers, the noncommitted and disinterested whom one cannot trust" because the literates seem disconnected from their 'tribe.'⁵⁰ Protocol with the Iroquois "dictated that no one could speak for a tribe or group unless he had been mutually appointed by all he was to represent. Neither could anyone speak his private views during public sessions of the council."⁵¹ This protocol was in contrast to the tendencies of some Euro-Americans,

⁴⁷Hagedorn, "A Friend to Go Between Them," 63.

⁴⁸Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 73.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 126.

⁵¹Hagedorn, "A Friend to Go Between Them," 68.

especially traders, to speak for their personal interests in the presumed name of those Euro-Americans in the more settled areas. The conflict was a practical matter of who should communicate, the individual or the group, because writing was manipulated by a select few and the spoken word was virtually open to everyone.⁵²

Each society's use of memory also produced conflict. "The memory systems favor verbatim memory for verse and thematic memory for oratory."⁵³ Different functions of the memory had repercussions on perspectives of the past and, thus, history. Oral cultures did not trust writing, viewing it as the destruction of the public memory.⁵⁴ Supplanting thematic memory with verbatim memory, aided by written words for recall, meant an erosion of oral society. On a deeper level, the interaction of past and present was thrown into disorder. Oral cultures considered the past part of the present, yet literate culture posited a distinct separation between them. Different perspectives of time made communication more difficult, especially if an oral and a literate culture were negotiating an issue whose framework hinged on the past and history.

A common, yet significant, struggle was literate society's inability to comprehend oral society's reverence for the spoken word. Literates considered the spoken word "a modification of something which normally is or ought to be written."⁵⁵ Consequently, literate society mocked the ritual and style of oral cultures. An example was the colonists' contempt for native rituals and ceremonies and British impatience with the Iroquois "penchant for careful deliberation."⁵⁶ Yet, ignorance of sound's primacy had the detrimental effect of limiting literate society's understanding of the "rhetorical tradition

⁵²Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 116.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁴Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 96.

⁵⁵Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 19.

⁵⁶Hagedorn, "A Friend to Go Between Them," 67.

which underlies...many political and social institutions," in both oral and literate societies.⁵⁷ Failing to appreciate the foundations of a culture's institutions, much less mocking its primary means of communication, did not provide the basis for successful relations.

⁵⁷Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 19.

CHAPTER II
RUMOR:
THE CROSSROAD OF ORAL-LITERATE CONTACT

When foreign cultures meet, rumor naturally emerges from the contact. In an intercultural context, rumor can be a negative form of communication, through the rapid spread of gossip. However, on certain occasions, rumor dampens conflict. A culling of the academic interpretations leads to the conclusion that rumor is a piece of information of pertinence to the society, transmitted rapidly with little or no verification of truth. Either way, rumor becomes a dangerous form of communication in intercultural relations. Rumor is one of the most manipulative and harmful devices available when communication is weak. Four qualities of rumor, in particular, deserve consideration in the context of intercultural relations: rumor as a construction, the value of rumor, rumor as a psychological projection, and credibility. Within these terms, rumor's potential as a weapon can be more easily distinguished.

At its core, rumor is a construction "forming a definition of a situation."¹ More often than not, rumor arises out of vague situations. As rumor spreads, the form and context of the news takes shape. This is especially true of a "troubling event or fact" where "rumor consists in the mobilization of the group's attention."² A "danger" that may have gone undetected until too late draws the public's attention. There lies the danger of rumor as a construction--the spotlight can be thrown indiscriminately on a fact or event of minor consequence, making the insignificant significant.³ The sighting of a Euro-American

¹Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), 9.

²Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations, and Images*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 24.

³*ibid.*, 76-77.

crossing native territory suddenly becomes the advance of an army aiming to steal native land, or a warrior hunting in the woods with bow and arrow turns into a war party looking to shed the blood of women and children. The danger is clear--a well-planted rumor can create a nonexistent threat. The rapidity of a rumor's transmission can foment uncontrollable fear or resentment.

Rumor's value grows when information is scarce. A rumor's transmission verifies its perceived importance to the population-at-large.⁴ Another source of value is the notion that rumors reveal secrets. Rumors are masked as "reality that the group should have known nothing about."⁵ No news will spread faster than information that is supposedly a "secret." A single whispered secret can fly through a population, leaving a trail of anxiety, anticipation, or apprehension. A rumor's value makes this means of communication difficult to control. A rumor lying dormant has no value.

Individuals act on beliefs which are not necessarily the truth, particularly when these beliefs are rooted in their psyches.⁶ Sometimes, rumors are nothing more than a release of pent-up tension and anxiety. Rumors are identified by their content, often portrayed as a revealed truth. Instead of truth, "personal anxieties" often emerge.⁷ The rumor's progression externalizes the individual's feelings, connecting the person to a larger network of like-minded people. Rumors between natives and Euro-Americans reveal anxiety over the loss of lands (for natives) and physical harm (for Euro-Americans). Anxiety, portrayed as truth by a rumor, can singlehandedly destroy any bridges to understanding or cooperation between two cultures.

⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

⁶Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 6-7.

⁷Kapferer, *Rumors*, 45.

If rumors are such emotionally charged, immediately unverifiable pieces of information, why do individuals believe in them? The reason is trust, a "confidence in a mechanism of information-related natural selection."⁸ The truth of a rumor's source is not called into question. Instead, the rumor is presented as embodying the truth. The listener assumes that if the rumor has made it this far, it must have been verified at some point. Particularly in societies with tight social networks (i.e., native-oral cultures), verification is taken for granted.⁹ The presenter of the rumor acts as a reliable source, and listeners, gauging their feelings of the individual's reliability, personality, and biases, choose whether to believe him or her. Interestingly, the presenter usually picks his audience because he knows they consider him reliable; we hear rumors from our doubles.¹⁰ Therefore, foreigners who ingratiate themselves in another culture have the ability to spread rumors benefitting their own causes and concerns, without regard for the host culture. Traders among the natives derived most of their power from the trust natives gave to them as neighbors. Essentially, trust is manipulated against a culture, taking advantage of anxieties and fears that only double the rumor's potency.

A rumor's success as a weapon hinges on the strength of the rumor network. As a human-centered activity, rumor-spreading preys on man's emotions and perceptions of reality. Although there are no rigid stereotypes or formulas for each encounter, certain roles seem to be fulfilled over the duration of a rumor's life. In any rumor exchange, three main figures are central to a rumor's progression: the relayer, the interpreter, and the leader. The relayer introduces the information to the group.¹¹ The

⁸Ibid., 103.

⁹Ibid., 5.

¹⁰Ibid., 68.

¹¹Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 15.

individual does not necessarily have to be a member of the group, but usually has some connection to the people. The relayer's information is relatively new, and probably still sensational to public ears. The interpreter analyzes the information.¹² He or she studies the context of the news and speculates on its probability. This is the person asking most of the initial questions. Finally, the leader considers the options, either endorsing the rumor or downplaying the news.¹³ The leader typically holds the most respect or status in the group. This person provides the unspoken verification of the rumor, permitting it to travel farther through the society's communication channels. These three roles are essential to a rumor's progress.

Researchers have pinpointed other minor roles in the rumor process, all having some significance within the network. Two minor roles, however, have some importance in intercultural contact: passives and doubters. Doubters stand as the human challenge to the rumor's progress.¹⁴ They ask the tough questions, demand proof, and urge caution on fellow auditors. If powerful enough, doubters can stop a rumor in its path. Passives, unlike the suggestion of their name, are a strong and large part of a rumor's audience.¹⁵ These people do not say much, answering their own doubts by listening to the debate around them. By their silence, however, they give credence to the rumor. Saying nothing is as powerful as saying it all. Without satisfying these two groups, a rumor will live a short life.

Although both men and women actively participate in the rumor process, popular culture has associated women with rumor spreading as communication.¹⁶ One argument

¹²Kapferer, *Rumors*, 96-97.

¹³Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 15.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵Kapferer, *Rumors*, 97.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 98.

claims that because women were excluded from discussion of public affairs, they duplicated the male sphere in discussing private business and spreading rumors.¹⁷ Gossip and rumor spreading became a sign of female solidarity. Although the gendering of rumor can be a limiting approach, it is important to stress the strength of female participation in the process between literate and native-oral cultures. For example, women wielded considerable power in Cherokee society because the men were often absent in battle or hunting and it was up to the women to guarantee the everyday survival of the tribe. Cherokee women assumed responsibility for agriculture and later were involved in bartering with Euro-American traders. The women had a voice in the tribal daily councils and cast the deciding vote for chieftainships.¹⁸ Cherokee women also formed their own council headed by the Beloved Woman, who was believed to possess the voice of the Great Spirit.¹⁹ The active role of these women permitted a freedom of communication usually denied to eighteenth-century women. The role of Cherokee women did not go unnoticed by colonists. Alexander Longe, a Cherokee trader, remarked in an account, "we should be well set to work to take notice of [Cherokee] women's actions."²⁰ The native women's roles as wives and traders with Euro-Americans made them privy to information that could easily be spread through the tribes.

Rumor in an oral society exhibits function and effect quite different from that in a literate culture. On the whole, literate society tends to downplay the role of speech in communication. The spoken word is evanescent, not easily verified, and wrapped in ambiguity. When compared to the solid character of the written word, speech is viewed

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁸Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 18.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁰Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 53.

with suspicion. However, colonists quickly realized that "much hinged on who spoke and who listened."²¹ While written rumors surely existed, most rumors subsist by some degree of oral transmission. The oral character of rumor gives it a completely different, and probably more powerful, position in a society that relies on speech for communication.

Rumor is the newspaper of oral culture. Without some form of writing, "word of mouth was the only social channel of communication."²² As the quality of newspapers vary, so too does the quality of rumors in oral culture. The structure of oral society makes the transmission of rumor easy. Tightly knit groups, whether clans, tribes, or entire nations, insure that news spreads to most, if not all, members. In this context, rumor does not have a negative connotation. Rumor is news, warnings, reports, welcomes, and notices. As such, it is also easier to conceive how rumors were not scrutinized for authenticity. It was merely information being passed on to those who had a stake in knowing it, no different from a modern person reading the New York Times.

Rumor also encourages unity within an oral culture. A rumor's life relies on the active involvement of the public, not as "thousands of isolated individuals, but rather as one group."²³ Rumor is collective expression strengthening social cohesion. Rumor also defines group allegiance. Through rumors, "the group communicates to us what we must think if we are to continue to be a part of it...to talk about rumors is to take part in the group."²⁴ Any rumor threatening the existence of an oral society is particularly effective in drawing it back together. The disparate Cherokee nations rallied together when the rumors of Euro-American encroachments reached their villages. Likewise, families on the Carolina

²¹Ibid., 11.

²²Kapferer, *Rumors*, 1.

²³Ibid., 104.

²⁴Ibid., 45.

and Georgia frontiers banded together when Creeks and Cherokees were rumored to be approaching.

Rumor's power is just as likely to destroy an oral culture's foundations as it is to erect its structure. This is especially true if rumor is wielded as a weapon by outsiders. Nowhere is rumor's destructive power more visible than between native (oral) and Euro-American (literate) cultures in colonial America. Euro-Americans manipulated rumors among natives, fully aware of the natives' reliance on and respect for the spoken word. Euro-American society needed a quick way to divide and conquer the natives. The easiest and most direct means, other than murder or relocation, was by infiltrating the natives' communication networks and spreading stories that furthered the aims of Euro-American society.

While many stories of native-Euro-American contact contain fascinating rumors, the Cherokee tribes provide a particularly interesting study because of the wide range of contact between the Cherokees, colonial society, and other tribes. Some of the earliest contact placed the Cherokees in the middle of English and French struggles for North American land. All sides in the battle attempted to use the others for their own profit. The friendship of the Cherokees was sought by the French and English, often through devious and manipulative means. Missionaries also had contact with the Cherokees, especially later in the eighteenth century. Records chronicle meetings with Jesuits and Moravians. The most frequent interaction, however, was between Euro-American traders and Cherokee tribes. The first traders appeared in Cherokee territory around 1698 and trade relations were established with Virginia by 1700.²⁵ In all of these contacts there lies the struggle between oral and written communication and the use of words as weapons.

²⁵Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 41.

Oral expression in Cherokee society was construed as "an art and a necessity."²⁶ The Cherokees spoke an Iroquoian language. Talking was stressed consistently, especially for important or official matters. In Cherokee, "interpreting a wampum belt" translated into "reading my talk." A talk was "sent" to settlers in another town, and a meeting of New England tribes and Americans was referred to as the "great talk."²⁷ Past names and deeds of chiefs were remembered through songs, as was most of the "history" of the Cherokees; matters of importance were spoken to embed their permanence in sound.²⁸

The Cherokee social structure supported an especially strong network for communication. As with most oral cultures, closely knit social groups facilitated the transmission of information. The Cherokees divided into seven clans: Ani-waya (Wolf People), Ani-Kawi (Deer People), Ani-Tsiskwa (Bird People), Ani-Wadi (Paint People), Ani-Sahini (Blue or Feline People), Ani-Gatu-ge-u-e (Kitawah People), and Ani-Gilahi (Long Hair People).²⁹ The clans interacted extensively, with few rules governing activity. Marriage within the clan of one's mother or father was forbidden, however, insuring a criss-crossing of relations and loyalties across clans. Strong relationships produced solid communication lines.

An initial survey of records reveals the manipulative function of rumor in native-colonial contact. Rumors tended to fall into four structures, situating the roles of relayer and audience. In three of the four cases, Euro-Americans were the relayers and the Cherokees became the interpreters, leaders, passives, and doubters. Some rumors were

²⁶Traveller Bird, Tell Them They Lie: The Sequovah Myth. (Los Angeles: Westernlore Publishers, 1971), 25.

²⁷Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 141-43.

²⁸Ibid., 14.

²⁹Ibid., 17.

begun by Cherokees and remained within the tribe, beginning as observations of colonial society.

The first structure establishes the English or French as relayer of news about the other power to the Cherokees. These are some of the earliest rumors available, when the French still possessed a North American empire and were conceived as a threat to the English, and vice versa. Both powers knew that it was necessary to befriend the Cherokees if they wished to succeed in their conquests. Rumors were spread against enemies, in the hopes of stirring native hostility and fear. The French told the Cherokees that the English only wanted land and would burn down native towns to get it. The English planted agents in Cherokee territory to counter French rumors with "news" biased against English motives.³⁰ During the American Revolution, the Americans replaced the French in the struggle for Cherokee support. English agents spread rumors that the Americans would kill all men, women, and children in frontier settlements, hoping to incite the Cherokees into warfare on the western borders.³¹ All of these rumors grew out of fear and greed, but were spoken under the guise of friendship and revelation.

The most blatant use of rumor occurred between English traders and the Cherokees. The content of the rumors usually concerned other traders and rival powers. An English trader told the Cherokees that the French were not to be trusted because they were "missionaries of hate."³² Not to be outdone, French traders told the Cherokees that the English planted smallpox in their trade goods, hoping to kill all the natives.³³ Stories of poisonings, tainted goods, and unfair practices spread like wildfire through Cherokee

³⁰Ibid., 49, 120.

³¹Ibid., 137.

³²Ibid., 50.

³³Ibid., 51.

territory. Because colonial traders did much business with native women, many of these rumors started among female Cherokee. Most of the stories were business tactics, but as relations on the frontier became more volatile, traders also spread stories of a more political nature.

A small group of rumors was probably the most basic --the middling colonist trying to take advantage of the natives by spreading rumors through the Cherokee community. Typically, the rumor was spread to gain native lands. Rumors revealed that other tribes or nations had ceded land or surrendered in battle, suggesting that the Cherokees should likewise comply in the face of inevitable defeat or pressure. Unfortunately, the records of these purely selfish rumors are more difficult to track down or, when discovered, very subtle in expression.

Finally, there were rumors started by a Cherokee for the Cherokees. These rumors contained observations, founded or unfounded, on colonial society. Sometimes, they were just warnings of impending danger, as when De Soto's travels through Cherokee lands were preceded by native messengers from neighboring towns.³⁴ At other times, rumors were predictions and interpretations of colonial society's actions. An early-eighteenth-century rumor spread among the Cherokees that English officers ran away at the approach of the French. The rumor was based on the single occurrence of an English officer deserting a fort under siege by the Cherokees and French.³⁵ Rumors as a mirror of anxieties and the struggle of communicating with images provided the foundation for these stories. The spread of these particular rumors only served to ease the later transmission of other, more serious, rumors.

³⁴ibid., 37.

³⁵ibid., 75.

Rumors in native-colonial relations took advantage of a literate culture's advancing dominance. Rumors were used to push the Cherokees and other tribes into actions and decisions that the colonists enforced with written documents, especially treaties. Some historians claim that the natives 'lost' when they no longer had possession of their lands. In reality, the natives lost when colonists could first use rumor to break up native social structure. The conquest of native land resulted from earlier instances of colonial society's corruption of native culture. Loose lips once sank ships; hundreds of years earlier, they sucked the breath out of a living nation.

CHAPTER III

THEY ARE OFTEN COMING HERE WITH TALK: RUMOR AS OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN NATIVES AND COLONISTS

As a component of official communication between natives and colonists, rumor served as a tool of espionage to counter rivals and to promote a nation's interests. The power of rumor became particularly important as the French, English, and Spanish scrambled for land in the Southeast. Each nation realized the importance of securing native alliances if it wished to profit in the New World.¹ European governments authorized agents and officials to go among the natives and to use any means necessary to further the nation's policies; rumor became one of the most popular "diplomatic" tools employed.

Through the South Carolina government, the English had official contact with the Cherokees beginning in 1693, after twenty chiefs came to Charles Town asking for assistance against the Catawbias and Congarees. The Cherokees were divided into three "Settlements" scattered throughout the Southeast. The Lower Settlement comprised western South Carolina and northeastern Georgia, the Middle Settlement included western North Carolina and north Georgia, and the Upper Settlement reached into western Tennessee and northern Alabama. After initial contact between the two societies, trade soon followed. By 1707 all trade (and most contact) was strictly controlled by the government; by 1716 a public monopoly of trade was established. Fort Moore, on the Carolina side of the Savannah River, was constructed not long after for the protection of

¹William S. Willis, Jr. "Divide and Rule: Red, White, and Black in the Southeast," in Charles M. Hudson, editor, *Red, White, and Black: Symposium on Indians in the Old South*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 101. Eventually, the competition for the Indians' loyalty would include the Americans. For some time, the South Carolina government had the trust of the natives in much of the surrounding region, forcing the French and Spanish to retreat farther away. After the Yamasee War, however, the English were weakened and the French and Spanish were back among the natives. The English greatly feared that another uprising would include the cooperation of enemy white men.

trade. By 1725 the Cherokee population in South Carolina numbered approximately 10,000.²

Relations between the English and Cherokees soon encountered problems. By the mid-1720s, French agents and traders among the Cherokees continually disrupted trade. The English also feared that the Cherokees would soon join with the Creeks to attack British settlements in the backcountry. Foreign agents in the Cherokee villages spread rumors to fan discontent with the English. The English decided to fight back by sending agents to the native villages to counter the influences of their European rivals.

Colonel George Chicken travelled to the Cherokees during the summer of 1725. Chicken sat on the South Carolina Board of Commissioners for Indian Affairs from 1721 to 1723. In 1724, he was appointed sole Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Southern Department. Chicken's mission to the Cherokees had two purposes: to counteract French influence (i.e., rumors) and to incite the Cherokees to war against the Creeks (who were primarily French allies) so the two tribes would not unite against the English.³ To accomplish those goals, Chicken took advantage of his status, which created trust among the Cherokees, and blatantly used rumor to the advantage of the British.

Most of Chicken's rumors contained anti-French propaganda. In one "talk," Chicken warned the chiefs against the brutalities of the French and their Indian allies:

At my giving out the Talk when I came to that part of it wch relates to their making any Treaty with the French or their Indians, *I thought fitt to Add the following Article to it: That if any french Man comes among them that they Secure them because they do all they can to destroy them And that altho they do not come into*

²Newton D. Mereness, Introduction to "Journal of Colonel Chicken," in *Travels in the American Colonies, 1690-1783*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 95.

³J. Ralph Randolph, *British Travelers Among the Southern Indians, 1600-1763*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 109.

Towns, Yet *they come a great way with their Indians (y[ou]r Enemies) in the path and down the river with a design to destroy your People* [italics mine].⁴

Chicken made no secret of his efforts to thwart the French. Whenever referring to the Cherokees' enemies, he mentioned them as "french Indians" to plant a hatred of the French in the Cherokee mind. Any opportunity Chicken had to denigrate the French, he seized. In a letter to Arthur Middleton, the acting governor of South Carolina, Chicken remarked:

We had an Accot of the french Indians doing some damage to the Upper People wch *I intend to make use of in my discourse to them in hopes that it will keep them at Warr with all Indians in Amity with the French* which these Lower People very very much approve of [italics mine].⁵

Chicken's anti-French rumors planted hatred based on stories of imminent danger at the hands of enemy tribes who were strengthened with French soldiers and guns.

Chicken's other rumors served the second half of his mission--to incite the Cherokees to war against the Creeks. These rumors usually took the form of military intelligence reports, stating the latest "news" of enemy movements and plans. No matter how circumstantial the story may have been, Chicken told the Cherokees his information in the hopes of keeping nations divided. Chicken received the following orders from Arthur Middleton:

the Creeks and Chactaws do design to fall on the Indians you are with, and thinking it to be an Advantage to them to know it I desire that you will take care that they Shall. If the Cherokees upon knowing this would raise a Strong party

⁴Colonel Chicken, "Colonel Chicken's Journal to the Cherokees, 1724," in Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies*, 118. After hearing this talk, the Cherokees agreed not to listen to the French and promised to detain any Frenchmen who came into the villages and to confiscate their goods because "they never had any Value for the french nor never will."

⁵Chicken to Middleton, "Journal," 107.

and keep out good Scouts they might give the Creeks such a blow as they would never be able to gett over....⁶

The English government worked under the maxim 'divide-and-conquer.' The English wanted control of the natives, and relations with the Cherokees assumed the movements of a chess game. Rumor in the form of news about enemy military plans permitted the English to move the Cherokees into desired positions. Chicken encouraged others to follow his example. He urged another official to "perswade them [Cherokees] to raise an Army of Men to Joyn these Lower people," persuasion facilitated by the spreading of rumors.⁷ Chicken's purpose was straightforward--to keep the Cherokees occupied with their enemies. The easiest way to rile the warriors, particularly those in an oral culture, was to insinuate threats to the welfare of the village or tribe. The energy directed to fighting enemies would prevent the Cherokees from attacking the English.

Some of Chicken's time was also spent countering the rumors spread by British enemies. Chicken had an especially difficult time controlling the rumors spread in Cherokee towns by the Chickasaws. On August 26, 1725, two Chickasaws from Savannah Town came to the village where Chicken was visiting. The Chickasaws claimed that a Creek and a white man in Savannah Town told them that the Cowetas had risen against the Yamasees and that the Upper Creeks were heading for the Cherokee Upper Settlement. Chicken claimed it was a falsehood because "if it had been true I should have heard it before now from the Comander of the Savannah Garrison or some of Our White Men."⁸ Chicken passed the information on to other English officials, but remarked "how

⁶Middleton to Chicken, "Journal," 144.

⁷Chicken to Wigan, "Journal," 149. In his letter to Wigan, Chicken was coordinating efforts to unite the Cherokee settlements together against the Creek and other enemies allied with the French.

⁸Chicken, "Journal," 133. Although Chicken was attempting to divide the Cherokees and Creeks, any rumors that were not his own doing earned his immediate suspicion.

true this Information may be I cannot Assure your Honours because they [Chickasaws] are always known to be a people that run from one Nation to another Inventing what Stories they can to Amuse the people with."⁹ Five days later, other Chickasaws came into the Cherokee village with the same story about the Upper Creeks' plans. At this point, Chicken's disbelief became more vocal and he actively discredited Chickasaw stories. In October, some Chickasaws came into the village spreading stories about the Upper Creeks and Chicken told the Cherokee chief:

I inform'd him that he very well know'd the Chickesaws never came Amongst them without they brought some Story or another and that I should be glad if they would make their words good in Joyning these people and going against the aforesd Towns but that I very much feard, and that We had not so much Value for the Southward people as to give Accot of their design as We had done them.¹⁰

Chicken encountered competition in the rumor 'market' among the Cherokees. Several groups carried the Cherokees' favor with stories and information, but only those who gained the Cherokees' trust could expect to further their own motives.

As Chicken worked among the Cherokees in 1725, Captain Tobias Fitch embarked on a similar mission among the Creeks. The Creeks populated the area northwest from the mid and upper Chattahoochee River over the western border of Alabama. Those villages along the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers contained the Upper Creeks, while villages surrounding the Chatahoochee River held the Lower Creeks. The Creeks acted as an independent nation, unwilling to form a steady alliance with any of the European powers. After the French constructed Fort Toulouse in 1714 for the purposes of trade, the Creeks

⁹Chicken to Middleton, "Journal," 136.

¹⁰Chicken, "Journal," 157. Although it was almost two months after the original story, there were still rumors that the Creeks were going to attack the Cherokees. By now, Chicken was believing the story, but not the offers of Chickasaw assistance.

became especially insolent towards English traders and officials.¹¹ The Creeks tended to deal most favorably with the Spanish, who came up from Florida with goods and stories. Fitch was sent among the Creeks to decrease growing French and Spanish influence after the Yamasee War and to procure respectful treatment for English traders.¹²

When Fitch entered the Creek nation, he found communities swirling with rumors. It was impossible to distinguish where the rumors came from, much less who circulated them. One of the chiefs, Old Brims, told Fitch, "there is a great many Storys Come into this Nation but from Whence they come I Can not Tell."¹³ Fitch's mission was much more difficult than Colonel Chicken's project because the Creeks were not as loyal in practice as the Cherokees.

Fitch reduced French and Spanish influence by countering their rumors with his own accusations and stories. While in one village, Fitch confronted a Spaniard who had been spreading rumors about the English through Creek towns. When the Spaniard reported that the headman, Old Brims, had summoned him to the village, Fitch retorted, "this is only ane Excuse of your Own makeing. I do not Doubt But you have Some Lying Stories to tell the Indians-as is Customary for you To do."¹⁴ Fitch then confronted the headman with the Spaniard's story. The headman denied summoning the Spaniard for a "talk" and stated, "they are often Comeing here with Talk and we never find any of their Talks to be True, and I no of no one here that wonts any of their Talk."¹⁵ Although it was

¹¹Mereness, Introduction to "Journal of Captain Fitch," 175.

¹²Randolph, *British Travelers Among the Southern Indians*, 113.

¹³Old Brims as quoted in Fitch, "Journal," 183. Considering the Creeks' willingness to talk with all Europeans, it is not surprising that the chief could not recollect where all the village "news" was coming from.

¹⁴Fitch, "Journal," 187. The Spaniard had a black man in his company, whom Fitch had seized to be sent back to the English; Fitch believed the man to be a slave taken from an English trader who came to one of the Creek villages. Fitch threatened to send the Spaniard "where the Negro is agoeing."

¹⁵Old Brims, as quoted in Fitch, "Journal," 187.

highly probable that the headman summoned the Spanish, Fitch played along and spread his own stories--"I Belive the Spanyolds brings a great many Lies among You."¹⁶

Fitch noted in his journal some of the rumors that European rivals spread among the natives. In one instance, Spanish rumors thwarted Fitch's efforts to speak with a Cherokee coming to the Creek towns to discuss an Englishwoman held as a slave. A Spanish captain in the Cherokee's town discovered the preparations for the voyage to Creek country and inquired as to the preparations. When told they were leaving to hear the 'talk' of a "Beloved man Come from the English," the Spaniard responded:

That is what we heard and therefore I am Sent to tell you from my King that the English Man Who is at the Creeks was Sent on purpose to Justice You There and then by the assistance of the Tallapoops he is to Lie [seize] you and Your Women and Childreen Carry you down and Send You over the great Water.¹⁷

Because of the Spaniard's rumor, the Cherokees refused to come among the Creeks and speak to Fitch. From a distance, Fitch remained powerless to counter the Spaniard's efforts.

The majority of Fitch's "talks" encouraged favorable stories about the English and reiterated the falseness of rival "talks." Fitch told the Creeks they could, if they desired, trade with the French because "I do not Endeavour to keep my Freinds like Slaves as the French do you."¹⁸ As the hostilities between the Yamasees and Creeks heightened, the Spanish actively spread rumors. Fitch, likewise, told his own stories, noting that the Spanish "Contrive" stories to save their allies.¹⁹ As a final note in most of his "talks" with

¹⁶Fitch, "Journal," 188.

¹⁷Spanish captain, as quoted in Fitch, "Journal," 193.

¹⁸Fitch, "Journal," 200.

¹⁹Fitch, "Journal," 203. Fitch also assured the Creeks that the Spanish were only looking out for the interests of the Yamasees.

the Creeks, Fitch implored the natives to "use the White [English] people well That Comes among you and never Forget your freindship to the English."²⁰

In 1772, another British agent went out among the Creeks. Captain John Stuart, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern District, sent David Taitt to the Creeks to spy on the natives during the turbulent years leading up to the Revolutionary War. Taitt's mission was to maintain peaceful relations between the Creeks and English and to determine the extent of Spanish activity among the natives.²¹ The Spanish posed a particular threat to English interests in the region. Stuart instructed Taitt:

As I have Received Information that there has been some time past an Intercourse and Correspondence between the Lower Creeks and Spaniards, at the Havannah you are to use every prudent means possible to acquire Information of this Correspondence and the Views of the Spaniards and Indians....²²

The Spanish had been operating among the Creeks for some time, spreading stories that made British policies difficult to enforce. According to instructions in Stuart's letter, Taitt was to tell one Creek town, "You know it was agreed upon that we should not Keep any thing a Secret from each other. I hear that there are many Talks between your Nation and the Spaniards, I hope you will communicate to all you Know to the Beloved messenger who carries this."²³ The Spanish rumors were serious enough to necessitate the sending of a British agent among the Creeks, a clear suggestion of the power of rumor in relations between natives and colonists.

²⁰Fitch, "Journal," 189. Fitch constantly strove to guarantee the proper treatment of English traders among the Creeks, as well as any officials who would follow him.

²¹Mereness, Introduction to "Journal of David Taitt," 493. Taitt was also to encourage the Creeks to cede a thirty-five mile strip of land along the Scambia River to the English for the alleged growing of rice and corn that would be sold to the Indians at reduced prices.

²²Stuart to Taitt, "Journal," 496.

²³Stuart to Taitt, "Journal," 547.

Taitt noted in his journal probably the most creative use of rumor in colonial espionage activities. A Spanish-speaking native woman acted as an interpreter between the Spanish and Creek Indians. The woman interpreted the following story, told to the natives by the Spanish:

the Kings of England and Spain had laid a Considerable wager whereby the former was to Kill all of the Indians of this nation in a Certain time, which if he did perform was to be paid the wager by the King of Spain and in case of failure was to pay him the wager. They likewise said that the time was now at hand that they had agreed upon to decide the wager, and the English would fall upon them soon.²⁴

The image of the two kings sitting across a table betting on who could kill all the Indians was ridiculous, but it was the kind of story that Taitt and other officials found themselves both working against and using for their own purposes. Rumors on all levels acted as explosive devices within the natives' oral culture.

Chicken, Fitch, and Taitt were not the only officials sent out to counter and fan the rumors racing through the natives' villages. In 1739, James Oglethorpe went out to form alliances with the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws as war with Spain appeared imminent. The British sent officials to the Cherokees in 1752 to prevent the Spanish and French from taking advantage of Cherokee displeasure with the English. A French official, Chevalier Lantagnac, was sent to the Cherokees in 1759 to fan discontent with the English and to incite attacks in the backcountry. The main tool these men utilized was rumor-- stories and information spoken as truth, even though evidence was often suspect.

Rumor was a secretly acknowledged method of controlling activities in the backcountry. Because of the natives' oral culture, the colonists considered them more

²⁴Taitt, "Journal," 558. Interestingly, no mention was made of how the natives reacted to the Spanish king being involved in the wager or what the terms of the wager were.

gullible, willing to believe any story told to them by a white man. To the colonists', orally communicated information, without written proof, was inherently false. In early contact, missionaries distinguished between native "fables" and European "truths" written in the Bible.²⁵ Later, traders and government officials would complain about the native propensity to believe any story spoken in the village, thus the struggle to counter stories from enemy sources. According to native custom, every speaker and his words were given an audience; the colonists demanded truth in written documents. Lieutenant Governor Lewis Burwell of South Carolina could not decide whether to listen to a Cherokee delegation because "as the Indians are an Illiterate People and have no Publick Token or Seal to give a Sanction to any Instructions they may charge their Embassadors with, it was impossible for us to discover whether they came properly empowered."²⁶ The "illiteracy" of natives led colonists to assume a lesser intelligence for the natives, or at least a disregard for truth.

Other incidents of rumors abound in the accounts and records of Indian relations in the Southeast. In one situation, a rumor gave rise to another rumor. An English engineer, John W. G. DeBrahm, was constructing Fort Loudon for the British. A rumor reached the fort that the French were on their way to attack it before its completion. DeBrahm panicked and moved two miles away. A rumor then circulated among the natives that "all the officers [British] will run away at the approach of the French."²⁷ After the French lost a large portion of their southeastern lands in 1763, French traders told The Mortar, a Creek chief, that the English were going to poison him at a council of native chiefs and

²⁵Axtell, *After Columbus*, 96.

²⁶DRIA, I, 160.

²⁷Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 71, 75. The British were building Fort Loudoun and the Cherokees were still inclined to trust French rumors. French officials spread stories about the English fearing the French and how the British would not stand by the Cherokees if they knew the French were in the vicinity.

headmen.²⁸ During the Revolution, rumors reached the Americans that John Stuart and other British agents were telling the natives to attack frontier settlements and to kill all the inhabitants without regard for age or sex.²⁹ After a smallpox outbreak, the French told the Cherokees that the English put the disease's germs in blankets and other goods meant for the Indians.³⁰ Many of the Indians were confused by the European rivalry for their affections; the Europeans took advantage of this confusion to spread rumors. The prejudices and affiliations of the natives took shape under the careful use of rumors by the Europeans.³¹

Typically, rumor was not an acknowledged tool of statesmanship; the phrasing of documents and instructions, however, suggested the acceptance of rumor's use in relations with the natives. The Treaty of Nogales, which formed an alliance in 1793 between the Creeks, Tallapoosas, Alibamons, Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Spanish, was constructed to "nullify the influence of the United States" among the natives.³² To counter American influence, the Spanish appointed commissioners and interpreters to live with the natives. The appointment of interpreters highlights an effort to infiltrate the communication networks of the tribes, the arena of rumor. James Oglethorpe was instructed by English

²⁸Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 123-124. A council had been called to facilitate the transfer of authority from the French to the British. Chevalier de Monberaut, the former French agent for Indian affairs, was working with John Stuart to make the transition as smooth as possible. Most of the natives were cooperative, but French traders preyed upon The Mortar's suspicions because he had been a major figure in the reduction of Fort Loudoun. Stuart sent a special emissary to the Cherokee town to invite The Mortar to the council. If Monberaut had not interceded, The Mortar would probably have not gone to the meeting.

²⁹Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 137-138. This is an example of how rumors traveled back and forth between natives and the Euro-Americans. The Americans completely believed this rumor--they tarred and feathered John Stuart's deputy to the Creeks, Thomas Brown, in Augusta.

³⁰Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 51. Smallpox rumors were particularly effective because of the devastation of the disease on native villages. Many of the Indians would believe any explanation of what had caused the death and disfiguration within the tribe. Some influential Indians, however, discredited the white men's stories and attributed the disease to the displeasure of the spirits.

³¹Randolph, *British Travelers Among the Southern Indians*, 99.

³²Jack D. L. Holmes, "Spanish Policy Toward the Southern Indians in the 1790s," in Charles M. Hudson, editor, *Four Centuries of Southern Indians*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1975), 68.

officials to "annoy the Spaniards" who were raising disturbances among the natives.³³ Colonel Chicken reported to Eleazer Wigan, an interpreter, about the rumors among the Cherokees and "what Charge the Country [England] hath been at to set those Stories in a true light."³⁴ Of course, the "true light" contained the English versions of these rumors. As long as the top officials in government were aware of the stories, agents were expected to use available or inventable information to further the country's Indian policies. Rumor was only a suspect practice when used by rivals among the natives.

In the natives' oral culture, the spoken word assumed a sacred character. European rumors were initially given consideration because they were spoken thoughts of living beings. The sacredness of speech, compounded by the intricate system of oral communication among the natives, permitted the rapid flow of rumors through Indian villages and towns. The natives, though, were not passive participants in the rumor-spreading process. They were aware of how the colonists viewed them intellectually and felt the repercussions in their social networks. A Cherokee remarked to Alexander Long, with some irony, that perhaps reading and writing may have allowed the natives to make cloth and guns and "peradventure the great god of the English would cause us to turn white as you are."³⁵

The natives usually refused to listen to "bad talks" and were dismayed by the prevalence of rumors in their towns and villages. Cherokee headman Old Hopp refused to believe a talk of Captain John Stuart and Lieutenant Robert Wall about the Tellico Indians because "he can't affirm every Flying Report for Truth."³⁶ One Cherokee chief shared

³³Mereness, Introduction to "A Ranger's Report of Travels with General Oglethorpe," 216.

³⁴Chicken to Wigan, "Journal," 163.

³⁵Axtell, *After Columbus*, 95.

³⁶*DRIA*, II, 246.

news of battle preparations among his warriors with Colonel Chicken, but "would not have any White Men to know it fearing it might come to the Knowledge of the Southward people [Creeks]."³⁷ The chief was aware of the intelligence networks based on rumor that formed in the Indian communities at the instigation of the Euro-Americans. Furthermore, the natives began to seek "proof" for rumors. In 1751 Cherokee towns received word of impending attacks by Creeks with the aid of other villages and the English. The rumor came after deliverance of a "good talk" from Governor Glen. The Cherokees believed the stories when Tennessee natives confirmed the rumors and after the Cherokees realized "they are left without Powder and Bullets, when Others are well supplied...there must be something in it especially as the white People were not suffered up."³⁸ No longer could the natives readily believe the "sacred" word of any speaker. An overflow of rumors by colonists in native villages forced new standards of acceptance of speeches.

Village headmen were especially disturbed by the young warriors' contributions to the rumor process. Old Brims, a Creek chief, told Tobias Fitch, "We that are headmen give no Credit to these Storys but the Young Men may believe them for What I know and Likewise add to them."³⁹ Rumors inflamed the passions and impulses of young natives, who were quick to fight and react rather than contemplate the truth of the stories circulating. In a culture where age was shown deference, young natives had to earn respect and influence. Typically, respect was gained with initiation as a warrior. Rumors sped up the initiation process by providing circumstances for battle or confrontation. Cherokee headmen, consequently, had to counteract the "talk" of young men. One headman, Raven, clarified for Governor Glen and his Council, "my Talk is not looked upon as Nothing, I am

³⁷Chicken, "Journal," 157.

³⁸*DRIA*, I, 100-1.

³⁹Old Brims as quoted in Fitch, "Journal," 183.

not a Young Man."⁴⁰ While the youthful speeches initially contributed to colonial efforts to break native ties, eventually the stories complicated relations as natives spoke more and listened less. All the colonists could ask the natives was "not to look on him [a young warrior] as a Head Man or Warrior, but as a Boy, and ... not to mind his talk."⁴¹ In the meantime, the colonists "found themselves drawn into the traditional Cherokee faceoff between young and old."⁴²

The Cherokee headmen faced another danger in their communities---the voices of women. Cherokee women were privy to many official talks through their high positions in the community. Most women, though, contributed to the rumor process through trade with colonists. In time, a few Cherokee women became spies for the colonists, believing they would save Cherokee lives through continued trade and the avoidance of military conflict. Nancy Butler was a Cherokee woman first employed by the colonists to purchase corn for the troops at Fort Loudon. Soon, she was "spoke to by Captain Demere to get him what Intelligence she could."⁴³ Wench Nancy, as she was called, faithfully passed on rumors in 1756 that the Cherokees planned to join with the French to attack British troops in the Carolinas. Captain Demere's report to Governor Lyttleton noted,

the Wench Nancy aforesaid who speaks good English...took the Emperor's wife aside, and got from her the News aforesaid, which may the more be depended on as those two Women are remarkably intimate...The Wench Nancy aforesaid when she gave Capt. Demere this Intelligence apprehended great Concern and cried also.⁴⁴

⁴⁰DRIA, I, 175.

⁴¹DRIA, I, 183.

⁴²Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 51.

⁴³DRIA, II, 276.

⁴⁴DRIA, II, 276.

Most native women, however, passed rumors on informally. A Catawba woman who had escaped from the Mohawks reported to the English that the Mohawks planned to annihilate the Catawbas.⁴⁵ If the rumor proved true, colonial control of southeastern tribes would be complicated. Some male colonists who viewed women as inferior refused to believe female stories. A group of traders reported rumors to Governor Glen in 1751, "but it was from Women."⁴⁶

In an oral culture, the spoken word was the only means of communication. What was spoken was conceived as truth, unless proven otherwise by actions or other spoken words. The colonists believed they had control of the natives' communication system because it was oral and had no standards of written proof. The Euro-Americans operated under the premise that they could not be caught in their lies because written proof did not exist within an oral culture.

The natives were not pawns; they often frustrated the Europeans' efforts to spread rumors. The natives spread their own stories and information and, if confronted, claimed that the Euro-Americans did not understand the native language. In a November 13, 1751 talk to the Cherokees, Governor Glen accused them, "many of your People have spread and propogated bad and dangerous Talks to the great Terror of our Traders."⁴⁷ The Oakfuskys spoke poorly of the English and were caught by Tobias Fitch and his men. The Oakfusky king, however, claimed "it was about the Chickasaws and not about you, and the White man does not understand our Talk."⁴⁸ The Creeks were notorious for playing the

⁴⁵*DRIA*, II, 49.

⁴⁶*DRIA*, I, 151.

⁴⁷*DRIA*, I, 157.

⁴⁸King of the Oakfuskys as quoted in Fitch, "Journal," 197. Fitch called in a white man and an interpreter to restate the conversation of the Oakfuskys, which was anti-English in subject, and made liars out of the natives. Fitch noted that the Indians "Seem'd to [be] under Some Concern, but Still Denied the words."

European rivals against each other. Headmen would send for Spanish agents' and traders' "talks" and then deny to the English that they had sent for the men.⁴⁹ The Creek also thwarted colonial efforts to form alliances with other Creek towns. Some Upper Creeks ran away from Governor Glen and his Council in 1752 after a Lower Creek reported that "some people say they [the natives] all ought to be hanged, and thereupon as our People were frightened, they all run away."⁵⁰ The natives took responsibility for setting the stage where rumors could be spoken. Without the willingness of the natives to listen to the stories, the colonists had no chance to push their versions of truth through the communication networks.

⁴⁹See Fitch, "Journal," 185-188.

⁵⁰*DRIA*, I, 232.

CHAPTER IV
PRIVATE INTEREST RUMORS:
TRADERS, INTERPRETERS, AND SLAVES AMONG THE CHEROKEES

In the battle of communication between natives and colonists, the actual content of an exchange was not primarily important, but rather the "presuppositions and strategies of speech."¹ The purposes of communication between cultures and the forms it assumed revealed the values and struggles between the two societies. In native-colonial contact, rumor was consciously wielded as a tool of manipulation to further national policies and commercial success. Although used primarily by the colonists, rumor also figured into the natives' strategies for manipulating relations with foreigners.

The colonists most frequently in contact with the natives were interpreters and traders. Traders blazed the paths to Indian villages, carrying with them the guns, kettles, and pejorative cloth desired by the natives. Although native interpreters existed, Europeans made an effort to learn the difficult native languages in order to "win their mind and souls."² These two groups of individuals had considerable influence in native-colonial communication, using rumor to further personal ambitions.

Traders operated as fairly independent entities among the native communities. Government control was difficult to enforce due to the colonists' inadequate transportation and information networks in the backcountry. Because they were often the only white men

¹Walter D. Mignolo. "Literacy and Colonization: The New World Experience," in René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini, *1492-1992: Re/Discovering Colonial Writing*. (Minneapolis: Prima Institute, 1989), 53.

²Yasuhide Kawashima. "Forest Diplomats: The Role of Interpreters in Indian-White Relations on the Early American Frontiers." *American Indian Quarterly*. 13:1 (Winter 1989), 3. According to records Kawashima studied, the "colonists were poor linguists as far as the Indian tongue was concerned." The native languages were extremely difficult and "the number of colonists who endeavored to learn native tongues, most of them missionaries, did not increase with the passage of time. More Indians learned English than settlers voluntarily tried to learn their languages."

seen by the natives, traders also assumed the role of unofficial diplomats and envoys from their respective nations. The traders' independence contributed to an uncensored environment where rumors easily proliferated; power was compounded by the traders' control of goods to the villages.

The traders used rumor principally to manipulate an economic advantage. They spread rumors to secure their hold on native trade. The most basic rumors concentrated on the poor quality and availability of rivals' goods. Antoine Bonnefoy had been captured by the Cherokees in August 1741 en route from New Orleans to Illinois. While a Cherokee captive, Bonnefoy spread rumors that English goods were twice as expensive for half the quality. Bonnefoy noted in his journal:

I told them [Cherokees], with regard to the trade into which they wished to bring the French, that our Limbourgs and guns, being better than those of the English, would cost them twice as many furs as they now paid, but at the same time our merchandise was much more durable; that a pound of our powder had twice as much effect as a pound of the English.³

English traders also had their promoters. One Englishman told the headmen of the lower Tallopooses, a Creek tribe, "you are such Slaves to the French that you dare not suffer our Traders to come among you for fear of offending your master the French Capt. Altho at the same time you cannot get cloth any other way than coming where our Traders are and buy of them, for the French are not able to get cloth."⁴ Product rumors were promotional skirmishes, when word-of-mouth selling often paved the way to native markets.

³Antoine Bonnefoy. "The Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy, 1741-1742," in Newton D. Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies, 1690-1783*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 250.

⁴Tobias Fitch. "Tobias Fitch's Journal to the Creeks," in Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies*, 199.

The natives perceived traders as representatives of their nations. Traders took advantage of this misconception to spread rumors that promoted the Indians' allegiance to a European nation, believing that such allegiance would benefit trade. Ludovic Grant, a South Carolina trader notorious for self-promotion, wrote:

As for my part, every opportunity that suitably offers, I fail not to tell and endeavor to persuade these people that the very name of a Cherokee is abominable to the French; and that they, with their Indians, want to patch up a pretended peace with the Cherokees that they may have the safer and surer opportunity to destroy them and in time cut them off from being a people.⁵

To a colonial government's dismay, traders spread rumors promising military assistance to tribes against their enemies. Because the Indians were expecting men and guns from the English, French, or Spanish, the natives would conduct business with that nation's traders. In 1724, a trader named John Hatton told a Cherokee woman in the town of Noyouwee that he had a letter from the South Carolina governor "that promised them men...and when they had pitched upon two men to go down to the English that they must give them in Charge to talk Strong to them and not to be affraid."⁶ While the rumors of government assistance were unfounded, they allowed the traders to buy time while moving their goods through the native villages. The rumors created a market that may not have been there otherwise.

Other traders spread rumors against the colonists, hoping to break down increasing government control of Indian trade. Alexander Cameron, a deputy to England's Indian Superintendent for the Southern District, remarked in 1765 that "a trader...will invent and

⁵Ludovic Grant as quoted in Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 50.

⁶Oath of Richard Hasford as quoted in "Colonel Chicken's Journal to the Cherokees, 1724," in Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies*, 104. Richard Hasford was, himself, a trader among the Cherokees. There is no explanation of why he reported on Hatton, but competition is a possible factor.

tell a thousand lies; and he is indefatigable in stirring up trouble against all other white persons that he judges his rivals in trade."⁷ Daniel Murfey of South Carolina told the Cherokees that goods were cheaper from Virginia and New York than from the Carolinas.⁸ John Eles, a trader from Virginia "advised them to go Home for the white People still had an Intent to hurt them."⁹ One English trader, William Simory, went among the Creeks claiming that the English were preparing to go to war against them, resulting in an end to trade, the loss of their lands to native enemies [i.e., the Cherokees], and the capture of their wives and children. Simory told the Creeks that proof of the plan was that all traders were "ordered to carry very little ammunition amongst them." Simory then promised the Creeks that he would stand with them to fight the English.¹⁰ The traders, as 'friends' to the natives, used rumor to benefit their business practices by forming an alliance with the Indians.

Understandably, traders had a reputation among government officials as rumor-mongers. An English official recommended laws confining traders to one or two towns because of the problem with rumors among the Cherokees.¹¹ A Frenchman commented on how English traders among the Cherokees were "daily instigating the savages."¹² Tobias Fitch, sent to the Creeks by President Middleton of the South Carolina Indian Commission, had to clarify for the headmen that the talk of traders did not always come from the king or colonial government. He explained in a meeting with Creek chiefs:

⁷Alexander Cameron as quoted in Brown, *Old Frontiers*, 125. Cameron's message is part of a letter from Captain John Stuart to Pownall in the *British Colonial Papers* dated August 24, 1765.

⁸*DRIA*, I, 219.

⁹*DRIA*, I, 257.

¹⁰David Taitt. "Journal of David Taitt's Travels From Pensacola, West Florida to and through the Country of the Upper and the Lower Creeks, 1772," in Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies*, 512.

¹¹Chicken, "Journal," 106-107.

¹²Bonnefoy, "Journal," 250.

there might have happen'd Some Cherokeys Tradours down and [they] may [have] Carr[ied] the Talk home to the Cherokeys; for you find the Traders here When they Come from our great Town if they here any thing of the Cherokeys they tell it you, and its as like the others may tell the Cherokeys. But I would not have you think its my Kings doeings, for he is a greater freind to you then You think on.¹³

A 1751 effort to regulate native trade ordered a ban on traders speaking for the government; the punishment was a loss of 100 pounds. The traders, however, had to report native talks or also be fined 100 pounds.¹⁴ The traders' relationships with the natives allowed them to funnel rumors through the communication channels, serving their ulterior motives and complicating official government relations with the natives. One exasperated official summed up the feeling in a postscript, "Poor hunts, too many traders, two very great evils."¹⁵

Another powerful clique of men among the natives was interpreters, who served in a variety of official and unofficial capacities. The interpreters' authority was based on a knowledge not only of native languages, but also of the customs and traditions which allowed them to accurately interpret native expression and thought.¹⁶ The relationship between interpreters, natives, and Euro-Americans was imbued with trust, an especially important point when European rivalries intensified over land in America. General Burgoyne observed how the British, lacking knowledge of native languages, were "often at the mercy of French-Canadian interpreters, who were all too prone to give vent to their jealousies and resentments by disaffecting the Indians."¹⁷ A French "Languist" warned the

¹³Fitch, "Journal," 199.

¹⁴*DRIA*, I, 136.

¹⁵*DRIA*, I, 216.

¹⁶Kawashima, "Forest Diplomats," 1.

¹⁷*ibid.*, 6.

Creeks in 1755 to keep "a sharp look out" for the English, who planned to destroy the natives and steal their lands.¹⁸ Even a subtle difference in tone or style could allow an interpreter to manipulate exchanges toward a desired goal.¹⁹

Rumors spread by interpreters usually manipulated words for political or personal purposes. Fellow interpreters dragged Henry Spelman before government officials because of the rumors he spread among the Indians. Spelman had spoken poorly of the colonial governor and told some chiefs that a more powerful man would be in power within the year.²⁰ The insolence Spelman could have bred among the natives had potential for serious consequences. While Spelman's motives were not stated for the record, they most likely had something to do with personal profit, probably in trade. However, the government's need for interpreters forced officials to give Spelman a minor punishment--he was stripped of his militia rank and ordered to seven years of public service as the governor's interpreter.²¹

Tobias Fitch, a South Carolina official, also had problems with unscrupulous interpreters. Fitch's regular interpreter, John Molton, refused to accompany him when he went to meet some Cherokee warriors. Needing to leave, Fitch decided to bring another man, William Hoge. Later, as Fitch was meeting with the head warrior, Molton broke into the conference and told the Indians that Fitch was a thief and that his "Talk was not good."²² Molton then threatened that "what Talks he had given while he was Lingester he would undoe for that the publick Intrust was not So advantageous to him as his Own."²³

¹⁸*DRIA*, II, 58.

¹⁹Hagedorn, "A Friend to Go Between Them," 65.

²⁰J. Frederick Fausz, "Middlemen in Peace and War: Virginia's Earliest Indian Interpreters, 1608-1632," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 95:1 (January 1987), 41-42.

²¹*Ibid.*, 42. Some officials wanted Spelman executed, but his "Childishe Ignorance" saved his life.

²²Fitch, "Journal," 207.

²³John Molton as quoted in Fitch, "Journal," 208.

The Cherokees witnessed the scene and the next day refused to meet with Fitch and Hoge. Fitch prevailed, but only after lengthy efforts to find allies among the Cherokees, who then shamed opponents into allowing Hoge to interpret. Through the spreading of rumors about Fitch and Hoge's credibility, Molton was able to disrupt official proceedings between the Cherokees and English for blatantly selfish purposes.

Because they had a direct role in the communication struggles between natives and Europeans, it might be expected that interpreters frequently abused their positions. However, such circumstances were rare. Rumors begun by interpreters existed, but most interpreters kept within the perimeters of their offices. An interpreter who was caught spreading rumors faced severe penalties from government officials. Thomas Bosomworth, a South Carolina agent, recommended the dismissal of John Kennard because "Kennard has been a constant Tool of our professed Enemies, has received considerable Sums for his Services in instigating the Indians against us, has been employed as Interpreter and supported in his License, though ill deserving it for his Zeal in opposing of us."²⁴

Besides self-guided interpreters and traders, the government feared a meeting of natives and slaves. There was a pervasive fear among colonists of allowing slaves and Indians to communicate. The colonists were well aware that "the wonderful art of communicating information" by slaves carried news "several hundred of miles in a week or fortnight."²⁵ Every effort was made to "break ties of language and understanding" developed from contact during military campaigns and in trade.²⁶ Taking slaves into native villages was discouraged, and laws outlined the conditions under which masters could have their slaves accompany them into Indian towns. In 1742, the South Carolina Committee on

²⁴*DRIA*, I, 281.

²⁵Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 75.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 36. Natives and Afroamericans were housed in the same camps during the Yamassee War. They also worked together in trading posts and in leather-carrying operations.

Indian Affairs recommended against Indians visiting near plantations because of the potential for talking.²⁷ Colonists who brought slaves into native villages usually paid fees and were carefully watched by traders and government officials.

Colonists feared that slaves and natives might share rumors to unite them against the whites. An English official worried about the presence of two traders' slaves among the Cherokees because "the Slav's that are now come up talk good English as well as the Cherokee language and I am Affraid too often tell falcities to the Indians which they are apt to believe, they being so much among the English."²⁸ Colonists feared two kinds of rumors if slaves and natives came together. On the one side, slaves, who were often privy to their masters' conversations, could make the native aware of plans concerning native trade and lands. On the other side, the natives could promise to provide runaway slaves refuge. The information, or disinformation, natives and slaves exchanged potentially put the colonists in danger, at least in the colonists' minds. For example, the English feared Maroons, or fugitive slaves, escaping into the Appalachian Mountains with the Cherokees and joining with the French to antagonize English settlers in the backcountry.²⁹ Colonists viewed a native who harbored runaway slaves as "an Incendiary and Disturber of the publick Safety."³⁰ All the English people's imagined terrors centered on rumors--simple communication between slaves and Indians.

For all their efforts, however, the colonists could not stop native and slave encounters. In 1751 the Cherokee hid three runaway slaves who reported that "white

²⁷William S. Willis, Jr. "Divide and Rule: Red, White, and Black in the Southeast," in Charles M. Hudson, editor, Red, White, Black: Symposium on Indians in the Old South. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 102.

²⁸Chicken, "Journal," 139. Colonel Chicken also noted that the two traders, Sharp and Hatton, paid one hundred pounds for bringing their slaves into the Cherokee towns and that Hatton did not have the king's interests paramount in his dealings with the natives.

²⁹Willis, "Divide and Rule," 104.

³⁰*DRIA*, I, 83.

people was coming to destroy them all" and "there was in all Plantations many Negroes more than White People" who would aid the Cherokees "for the sake of Liberty."³¹ In 1759 a proposed slave revolt in Charles Town was discovered by the government. A written paper said "that the 17th day of June was fixed upon for killing the Buckraas [whites], but afterwards told him that it was agreed to wait til the corn was turn'd down and the Indians were then to be sent to and they would come and assist in killing all the Buckraas."³² Philip Johns, author of the "written paper," admitted that "the Indians were to be concerned in the extermination of the white people from the face of this Earth."³³

The European strategy to counter native-slave exchange was to spread rumors that flamed suspicion, fear, and hatred between the two cultures. In 1739, English officials told the Cherokees that a smallpox epidemic in their villages came from African slaves in Charles Town.³⁴ Colonists told tribal leaders that slave promises to assist in uprisings were false. Colonists also used the natives as slave catchers and spread stories through slave quarters about the atrocities performed on captured runaways.³⁵ The French turned three slaves over to the Choctaws in 1730, hoping that their torture would provide an example to other slaves.³⁶ Colonists infiltrated the predominately oral cultures of slaves and Indians with rumors meant to manipulate cultural prejudices and increase mutual

³¹*DRIA*, I, 103.

³²Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 112. Phillip Jones and John Pendarvis were two free mulattoes accused of "seditious practices" against the white people living in Charleston. Johns was accused of writing the note described above for co-conspirators.

³³*ibid.*, 111.

³⁴Willis, "Divide and Rule," 105. The French told the Cherokees that it was the English who spread the disease through the villages [see Samuel C. Williams, *Adair's History of the American Indians*. (Johnson City, 1928). 244-245.].

³⁵Willis, 107.

³⁶Willis, 107. The slaves were turned over because they had assisted the Natchez against the Choctaws in 1729. The French were not disappointed in receiving an example--a Jesuit missionary noted the cruelty of the torturous burnings and the inspired fear among the slave population that would "secure the safety of the colony."

suspicion; essentially, one rumor replaced another. The colonists' efforts were fairly successful because relations between slaves and Indians were often marked by fear and apprehension.

Rumors among natives, traders, interpreters, and slaves might be termed private interest rumors--questionable information circulated for an individual's purpose during routine face-to-face conversation. Although colonial governments tried to regulate this contact, it was an almost hopeless enterprise. In the backcountry, the individual was a stronger presence than the government. Thomas Bosomworth, a South Carolina agent sent into the Creek nation in 1752, reported, "so few have any characters to lose that the reporting of Things which would touch a Man's Life is looked upon as a very trifling or rather no Crime at all."³⁷

³⁷*DRIA*, I, 271.

CHAPTER V

THE FINAL WORD

In a modern world demanding written and visual proof, oral rumors seem quaint and unreliable. Yet rumors were potent weapons in native-Euro-American relations. The words of one individual could wreak havoc throughout the backcountry. A white woman caused major disturbances among the Creeks by claiming that traders' goods were actually presents from the English king and traders were deceiving the natives.¹ Control of rumor dissemination parlayed into temporary control of communication and individuals.

The struggles with rumors reflected a general struggle of communication hierarchies. The Europeans had no respect for the natives' oral culture, deeming the Indians intellectually inferior because of their respect for the spoken word. Walter Mignolo and others call this prejudice for the written word "the tyranny of the alphabet":

The tyranny of the alphabet is part of that scriptist bias which is deeply rooted in European education. It fosters respect for the written word over the spoken, and respect for the book above all as a repository of both the language and the wisdom of the former ages.²

To colonists, a people were only as real as their history. If a culture did not have writing, then how was it possible for the people to have a documented history 'proving' their existence? As such, the colonists felt superior to the natives and had no difficulty in justifying their manipulation of native communication for their own purposes. Engaging in the oral transmission of information was not accommodation on the part of the colonists.

¹Taitt, "Journal," 552.

²Roy Harris, as quoted in Mignolo, "Literacy and Colonization," 57. The passage is from Roy Harris, *The Origin of Writing*. (Illinois: Open Court, 1986), 4.

Instead, the colonial spreading of rumors used the natives' own norms against the oral culture. The colonists' secret weapon was imbedded within the structure of native culture. According to T. Hatley, "the powers of villages were challenged as the volume of communication increased."³ By 1751 the English were in a position to order the Cherokees, in a treaty negotiation, to not believe a talk unless there was a written document sealed by the Governor verifying the speech.⁴ The natives watched as written words overtook spoken words. Cherokee headman Skiaqunta lamented "we can talk, it is true, but we cannot write as they do, for they are talking to themselves, though we do not hear them."⁵ The natives choked on "talk" force-fed to them by the invaders.

³Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 12.

⁴*DRIA*, I, 192.

⁵*DRIA*, I, 453.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Axtell, James. *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Berger, Thomas R. *A Long and Terrible Shadow: White Values, Native Rights in the Americas, 1492-1992*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991.
- Braund, Kathryn E. Holland. *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.
- *Mutual Convenience-Mutual Dependence: The Creeks, Augusta, and the Deerskin Trade, 1733-1783*. Diss. Florida State University, 1986. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1986. 8708162
- Bright, William. *American Indian Linguistics and Literature*. New York: Mouton Publishers, 1984.
- Brown, John P. *Old Frontiers: The Story of the Cherokee Indians from Earliest Times to the Date of Their Removal to the West, 1838*. Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, Inc., 1938.
- Condon, John C. and Fathi S. Yousef. *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1975.
- Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, May 21, 1750-August 7, 1754*, ed. William L. McDowell, Jr. Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1958.
- Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, 1754-1765*, ed. William L. McDowell, Jr. Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1958.
- Dowd, Gregory Evans. "The French King Wakes Up in Detroit: Pontiac's War in Rumor and History," *Ethnohistory*. 37:3 (Summer 1990), 254-278.
- Fausz, J. Frederick. "Middlemen in Peace and War: Virginia's Earliest Indian Interpreters, 1608-1632," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 95:1 (January 1987), 41-64.
- Hagedorn, Nancy L. "A Friend to Go Between Them: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-1770," *Ethnohistory*. 35:1 (Winter 1988), 60-80.
- Hatley, Tom. *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians Through the Era of Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

- Hudson, Charles M. *Four Centuries of Southern Indians*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975.
- , ed. *Red, White, and Black: Symposium on Indians in the Old South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971.
- Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade: September 20, 1710-August 29, 1718*, ed. W.L. McDowell. Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1955.
- Kapferer, Jean-Noel. *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations, and Images*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990.
- Kawashima, Yasuhide. "Forest Diplomats: The Role of Interpreters in Indian-White Relations on the Early American Frontier," *American Indian Quarterly*. 13:1 (Winter 1989), 1-14.
- Kidwell, Clara Sue. "Indian Women as Cultural Mediators," *Ethnohistory*. 39:2 (Spring 1992), 97-107.
- McLoughlin, William G. *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Mereness, Newton D., ed. *Travels in the American Colonies*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1916.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Literacy and Colonization: The New World Experience," *1492-1992: Re/Discovering Colonial Writing*. Rene Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini, editors. Minneapolis: Prima Institute, 1989, 51-96.
- Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion, 1729-1748*. Dunbar Rowland and A.G. Sanders, editors and translators. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984.
- Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion, 1749-1763*. Dunbar Rowland and A.G. Sanders, editors and translators. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Methuen, 1982.
- *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.
- Randolph, J. Ralph. *British Travelers Among the Southern Indians, 1660-1763*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973.
- Rothrock, Mary U. "Carolina Traders Among the Overhill Cherokees, 1690-1760," *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications*. 51 (1979), 14-29.

- Shibutani, Tamotsu. *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966.
- Traveller Bird. *Tell Them They Lie: The Sequoyah Myth*. Los Angeles: Westernlore Publishers, 1971.
- Woodbury, Anthony C. and Joel Sherzer. *Native American Discourse: Poetics and Rhetoric*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Wright, J. Leitch. *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.
- Zolbrod, Paul G. *Reading the Voice: Native American Oral Poetry on the Page*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995.

VITA

Victoria Eileen Kane

Born in Bethesda, Maryland, September 2, 1971. Graduated from Severna Park High School in Severna Park, Maryland, June 1989, B.A., Loyola University-New Orleans, 1993.

In August 1993, the author entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate assistant in the Master of Arts program for the Department of History.