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# From Native Sovereignty to an Oilman's State: Land, Race, and Petroleum in Indian Territory and Oklahoma

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## Abstract

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Indian Territory and the State of Oklahoma experienced one of the world's largest petroleum booms, with much of the oil extracted from the territory and state produced on land owned by Indigenous, Black, and mixed-race peoples. White settlers, backed by governing institutions and cultures rooted in settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, and anti-monopolism, struggled to seize control of oil-rich land amid the allotment of Native-owned property. These latter elements insisted that non-whites could not grasp the value of petroleum nor be trusted with the control of such a vital resource, especially in the shadow of ever-looming oil monopolies. Settlers and wildcat prospectors built a white-supremacist oil-field politics that elevated the rights of small-scale, proprietary "independent" oilmen and worked to ensure that the latter controlled flows of crude vis-à-vis non-white property holders and "outside" corporations. For white settlers in Indian Territory and Oklahoma, oil rose to the top of collective imaginaries about race, property, and wealth, encouraging the creation of both legal and often violent extralegal strategies for dispossessing unworthy landowners of their hydrocarbon inheritance.

**Keywords:** oil; white supremacy; settler colonialism; racial capitalism

In 1907, two geology professors, G.E. Condra and Charles N. Gould, published an informational tract in the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* touting Indian Territory's prospects as a destination for industrious white settlers. Included in "Opening of the Indian Territory" was a narrative on the territory's burgeoning petroleum industry, which Condra and Gould predicted would continue to grow. They lamented how the collective system of land tenure practiced by the territory's Indigenous nations and "Government control" (a reference to federal restrictions) had retarded oil prospecting. However, in the authors' eyes the allotment of Indian land into individual properties was quickly solving that problem; indeed, on the verge of statehood, Indian Territory contained thousands of oil wells and a "nearly continuous line of derricks," seventy-five miles in length, that extended from southern Kansas to Tulsa. Condra and Gould's interest in oil

was perhaps predictable given their backgrounds in the infant science of geology. But their guide to Indian Territory was just as invested in explaining the region's racial makeup. The two white authors noted the differences they saw between "full-blood," "mixed-blood," and "quarter-breed" Indians; indicated that Cherokees had for years readily mixed with whites, while Creeks tended to marry into Black families; and insisted that white civilization was bound to overtake this mixed-race world. "The white man is to rule," they stated, "and the problem of the Indian is largely solved in his amalgamation." It had been the "destiny" of Indigenous people to "give [their] blood and a few strong traits" to white society, but to otherwise disappear. Meanwhile, "The negro is to remain a problem in social, educational, and industrial matters." It was from this "cosmopolitan body" that the "crucible of civilization is to reduce a citizenship" in Indian Territory.<sup>1</sup>

Over the following two decades, establishing the white man's citizenry that Condra and Gould envisioned turned out to be heavily rooted in funneling the streams of wealth that flowed from petroleum into the hands and pockets of whites, despite Indian Territory and Oklahoma's status as a region of widespread Indigenous, African Indian, and African American landownership. The practices that allowed white people to remove oil wealth from Native and Black pockets were the product of a racialized mineral regime founded upon the settler principle that non-whites were especially incapable of self-governance in a world of petroleum abundance. This principle was baked into the settler-colonial policy of allotting collectively held tribal land into privately owned homesteads. As part of this process, white lawmakers and officials prevented newly-minted Indian landowners from alienating their allotments and mandated that white guardians oversee the leasing of land for oil production. Likewise, the State of Oklahoma required that white guardians oversee oil-rich allotments owned by Black citizens of the state's Indian nations. While such rules ostensibly "protected" Indigenous and Black Indigenous landowners from losing their property, they provided a legal path through which white settlers seized Native property, squandered Black and Indigenous wealth, and forced Indians and other peoples of color off of the most desirable pieces of oil land.<sup>2</sup>

Allotment was a federally backed scheme to educate Natives in the traditions of economic individualism and cultural liberalism, to force Indigenous peoples to, as one historian puts it, learn the "whitening culture of capitalism." However, the potential of great mineral wealth in Indian Territory destabilized this social-engineering project, which was built on the assumption that large swaths of land of relatively equal value could be easily divided among tribal citizens. Contrary to this, oil abundance offered a handful of "full-blood" Indians and African Natives unimaginable riches through the tapping of dormant petroleum resources, which undermined white reformers' goals of transforming Native people into yeoman farmers and wage workers.<sup>3</sup> For lawmakers, federal agents, and local officials and business owners, this threat to the reformative ethos of allotment helped justify white control of Natives' oil inheritance. Oil booms threatened to equip people of color with social and economic power just as whites worked to define and instill a racial hierarchy that achieved the opposite. It became imperative for whites to closely manage Indigenous and Black petroleum property, not only as a means of expanding the former's material possessions, but also as an avenue through which social difference could be more broadly policed and white sovereignty achieved. Despite this, Indigenous and African Indigenous individuals used settler institutions, such as state and county courts, to defend their right to oil-rich property and to leverage the racialized property regime that assumed their incompetence to their advantage.<sup>4</sup>

White settlers claimed hydrocarbons for themselves not only by appealing to racialized notions of “competence” rooted in the assumption that non-whites could not grasp the value of fossil-fuel energy. They also drew upon fears that white enterprises were constantly under the threat of domination by “outside” monopolies to argue that petroleum and the lands it resided beneath must be controlled by “local” whites. In both instances, white settlers struggled to reckon with how petroleum altered distributions of wealth and property. Oil booms enriched non-white individuals while leaving many white people in possession of worthless land and under the economic thumb of monopolistic oil corporations. This only further encouraged the development of an oil-field culture that dismissed non-white communities as rightful claimants to “black gold” while elevating the righteousness of small-scale, settler-owned enterprises. Borrowing from the historian Timothy Mitchell, the conflicts over racial identity, property rights, and distributions of wealth that rankled white people’s claims over Indian- and Black-owned oil land amounted to the “engineering [of] political relations out of flows of energy.”<sup>5</sup> In Indian Territory and Oklahoma, this energy politics often resulted in carbon despotism, as petroleum abundance encouraged undercapitalized white oilmen to embrace a politics that fused white supremacy and anti-monopolism and drove broad resistance to non-white wealth and sovereignty. The latter not only resulted in myriad individual attacks on people of color, but, as we will see in the conclusion, also contributed to one of the United States’ worst race massacres on record.<sup>6</sup>

### Native Sovereignty, the Politics of Monopoly, and the Discovery of Oil in Indian Territory

Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, crude oil’s place in the economy, ecology, and culture of Indian Territory transitioned from the low-impact use of petroleum as a health product, to the Anglo-American-led establishment of high-intensity drilling ventures aimed at securing one of nature’s densest forms of energy. The earliest petroleum-centric enterprises in Indian Territory had been tribally-owned health resorts that marketed oil springs as rehabilitative. In 1853, a federal Indian agent stationed in the Choctaw Nation reported on such a spring, writing, “[t]he oil springs in this region are attracting considerable attention, as they are said to be a remedy for all chronic diseases ... The fact is that it cures anything that has been tried.” Gardner Tubby, an African Choctaw man, worked at a tribally owned health resort where he labored among springs black with oil and collected petroleum-laden sands that guests used as a salve to treat “boils, cuts, bruises and other afflictions of the human body.” The business thrived for ten or fifteen years, beginning in 1881, and Tubby recalled that “[t]he sick and afflicted would come from far and near, camp and drink and bathe in the water from these springs.” Native people and settlers across North America had long utilized oil seeps and other naturally-occurring petroleum springs for medicinal purposes. Skimmed from water sources by human hands and applied to the body, this method of use in many ways contradicted the industrial extraction of petroleum that white Americans developed beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, oil’s centrality to energy systems was only one chapter in its history as a utilitarian substance. Nevertheless, the geologic circumstances that brought oil to the surface in the form of springs also beckoned those whose interest lay in petroleum’s combustibility.<sup>7</sup>

The first discoveries of extractable deposits of oil in Indian Territory vexed Native governments, federal officials, and oil companies, as the rights of non-Native prospectors

and enterprises in Indian Territory remained ill-defined. In 1859, Lewis Ross, the brother of Cherokee Chief John Ross, accidentally discovered a small oil pool near Grand Saline in the Cherokee Nation while mining for salt. Ross's find occurred the same year that drillers in western Pennsylvania sank the first profitable oil wells in the United States. In the years following the Cherokee man's discovery, a handful of white oil drillers traveled to Indian Territory to sink exploratory "wildcat" wells. These oilmen met formidable obstacles in their efforts to create a viable petroleum industry. For one, Indian Territory remained geographically isolated from petroleum markets and largely bereft of the industrial materiel and concentrated capital that successful drilling ventures required. Furthermore, in the late nineteenth century, it remained unclear to oil prospectors and Indian nations alike just how federal policy would govern mineral extraction. The Five "Civilized" Tribes (the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations) barred white people from citizenship and restricted landownership to intermarried whites, but retained little power when it came to negotiating leases with outside companies. When white prospectors did enter Indian Territory, federal officials tended to insist that these U.S. citizens cease operations and leave the Native nations.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the conflicts that arose around the leasing of land for oil production conjoined with the politics of allotment, which combined race-based defenses of private property and anti-monopolism in calling for the dissolution of communal tribal land bases. In the eyes of allotment's supporters, Native nations ultimately could not be incorporated into the United States because they were uncommitted to the establishment of private-property relations. In short, as the anthropologist and historian Patrick Wolfe writes, in the eyes of many white Americans, "Indians were the first communist menace." Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts chaired the Dawes Commission, which was established in 1893 to lead negotiations with the Five Tribes and achieve the transformation of their communally held lands into individually owned homesteads. Dawes and other white "Indian theorists" of the time demanded allotment based upon a moral and ethical defense of individually-held private property. Dawes described Native people's communal land regimes as "Henry George's system," understanding common property not as a long-standing tenet of Indigenous culture and nationhood, but in Euro-American terms that equated communalism with single taxers, Marxists, and other radical leftists. He lamented that, with Indigenous property relations, "There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization." The Dawes Commission and its supporters also viewed allotment as a means to fight monopoly. Allotment would, in theory, redistribute land controlled by a consolidated minority of "mixed bloods," or those Natives considered "whiter" than others—usually by a combination of white familial ties and a commitment to market relations—to the majority "full bloods," those individuals considered furthest from racial and cultural whiteness. In hopes of socially reengineering "full bloods" into whiter subjects, the commission placed restrictions on the sale of individual Indians' allotments based on blood quantum, which was established through often unreliable surveys. The more Native "blood" the state deemed an individual to have, the longer that Indigenous person was required to hold onto their land and, in the process, absorb the nuances of white yeoman culture and the rules of private property.<sup>9</sup>

Indian Territory's Indigenous nations proved especially opposed to allotment. In the early nineteenth century the Five Tribes had been exemplars of self-directed adaptation to white civilization, adopting Anglo-American-style governmental institutions prior to their forced march westward from the southeastern United States to Indian Territory. However, by the late nineteenth century, these nations represented allotment's strongest detractors. White officials grew convinced that the tribal nations in Indian Territory

would never voluntarily give up their communal land base. When Congress passed the 1898 Curtis Bill, which created the final framework for the Five Tribes' allotment, a Cherokee man voiced misgivings that other Indigenous peoples shared, sardonically writing, "there will be oil leases, asphalt leases, gold leases, stone leases, marble leases, granite leases, air leases, and possibly the very blessed light of the sun (should it prove capitalizable) may be captured and monopolized by some shrewd speculator under one of Charlie Curtis' wonderful lease-traps." While Native opposition was often fierce, the leadership among the Five Tribes begrudgingly accepted allotment, understanding that recalcitrance would end with the forced breakup of their collective land bases at the hands of the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Indian leaders tasked with navigating allotment and the ongoing prospecting and leasing of their land looked to petroleum resources as a means to maintaining a semblance of collectivism. Principle Chief Pleasant Porter of the Creek Nation regretted the discovery of oil on Creek land made by white and "mixed-blood" drillers in the summer of 1901. Porter feared that the oil finds, which occurred near a tiny cattle town called Tulsa, would complicate the allotment process, making land that was previously worthless from an agricultural standpoint suddenly desired by whites and Indians alike. He believed that allottees should seek out a home and livelihood on tracts that had a "normal use as agricultural lands," while oil land should be declared surplus and proceeds from it distributed for the benefit of "every citizen of the [Creek] Nation." Such a regime was not unheard of. The Osage Nation retained collective mineral rights and distributed royalties from oil production through such a system. However, Porter's call for the nationalization of petroleum would not be realized among the Five Tribes. Indian allottees, through the oversight of local, state, and federal officials, would sign leases and earn royalties from oil as individual landowners. These conditions not only met the Dawes Commission's conception of allotment as a mediated introduction of Indians to white people's market economy, but also fit the notion that Indians' communal holdings were in fact monopolies controlled by nefarious outsiders, and that the preservation of any collectivist property relations would disintegrate into the same.<sup>11</sup>

The idea that only white-settler enterprising could thwart monopoly power also painted demands for more liberalized leasing and oil-production rules on Native-owned land. Seymour Riddle, a white attorney representing the United Commercial Clubs of the Indian Territory before a Senate committee in 1906, ridiculed federal rules that barred oilmen from selling their leases for profit and required lessees to prove that they held enough cash to develop a lease. "No individual or corporation without a vast amount of money can comply with these rules and the result is that only the very wealthy individuals and corporations of unlimited means have been able to secure the approval of very many oil and gas leases." Riddle's allusion to "corporations of unlimited means" was a veiled reference to Standard Oil, which smaller wildcat prospectors assumed was ever poised to dominate Indian Territory's emerging petroleum fields. Riddle and other oil and gas developers hinged their arguments against federal rules on what often appeared esoteric, such as the requirement that drillers secure a bond that would insure their lease in case of a failed operation. However, such questions struck at the core of allotment, white settlement, and oil development: How should property be administered, and to whose ultimate interest? For Riddle and many other white oilmen—especially small independents—restrictions on the alienation of Indian property were "wrong on principle" and violated "business rule," and thus must be eradicated, lest Standard and other monopolists prey on supposedly naïve Indigenous property holders and dominate markets in land and oil to the detriment of white settlers and their families.<sup>12</sup>

For these independent oilmen, race, minerals, and land were intertwined. Only a property regime established on the basis of small-scale white enterprise could thwart the wasteful monopolism of land and minerals by way of both large “outside” oil companies and federally protected, backward Indigenous landowners. Before the same Senate hearing, “Colonel” J.W. Zevely, a white man who represented the Muskogee Commercial Club, lambasted not only federal restrictions, but also the risk that Indians represented to the proper commercial use of oil and gas. Zevely objected to federal rules that required oil producers to pay Creek and Cherokee allottees \$50 annually for unutilized gas wells. Race played into Zevely’s concerns. If a white oil producer abandoned a gas well, then control of the well reverted to the Indigenous allottee, “and he may not exercise the care that the lessee must preserve not to waste it.” Zevely was further angered when he could not obtain signatures on leasing papers without paying exorbitant bonuses to the individual Indian in question. And as prospecting for oil increased, so did the cost of bonuses. Zevely lamented the annoyance and out-of-pocket expenses this brought about and complained that “[a]n Indian may not know the value of his land, but just try to get a lease from him on some of his land, and you will see that he has a pretty good idea of what its value is—generally an inflated idea, though.” Ultimately, what angered Zevely most was that, in his view, the Department of the Interior unilaterally established the rules that governed how oilmen obtained access to Native land and minerals. He did not believe the federal government could exercise such close oversight of private enterprise. Zevely ended his statement by asserting that Congress “can’t pass laws that will protect a man against himself,” regardless of race.<sup>13</sup>

Ignoring men such as Pleasant Porter and the bonus demands of their own Indigenous lessors, Zevely and other white oilmen insisted that Indians could not grasp the value of petroleum nor conjure the capital and labor needed to pull it from the earth. If these and other white settlers understood the need for some mediation between settlers, the government, and Indigenous individuals in the realm of landownership, they rejected similar oversight of the subterranean world, despite the fact that the two were inextricably linked. Ultimately, what Zevely and many of his white contemporaries in Indian Territory desired was their own state, which would offer white businessmen the opportunity to form their own government that could set the rules of the oil game and achieve the expansion and intensification of white sovereignty. White men realized that dream in 1907 when Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory were fused to form the State of Oklahoma, just as the largest oil booms yet seen in the region—booms that disproportionately occurred on Native allotments—commenced.

### **Mixed-Race Oil Fields in a White Man’s State**

The allotment of tribal land and the discovery of new oil fields accelerated during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1905, drillers again struck oil near Tulsa, opening the Glenn Pool field, the first large oil find in Indian Territory. The Texas Company (Texaco), Gulf Oil, and others built pipelines connecting the oil-producing area to refineries in Texas, Kansas, and the Chicago area. Tulsa quickly grew into a regional hub for the oil industry, becoming the home base for numerous banks, refineries, and oil-field service companies. The Glenn Pool field’s success meant the dreams and efforts of capitalists centered in New York City; skilled workers from the oil fields of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia; and farm families from across the beleaguered cotton and wheat fields of the South and West fixed upon the region’s oil prospects. Wildcatters continued to open



modestly producing fields until 1912, when another massive oil find was made fifty miles west of Tulsa, near the town of Cushing in Creek and Payne counties. Cushing quickly grew into one of the world's most prodigious oil fields. The crude that drilling companies extracted from the lands of the Creek Nation was of especially high grade, perfect for refinement into gasoline, the demand for which had exploded with rises in automobile use and continued to expand as World War I kicked off in Western Europe. Production in the field peaked in April of 1915 at over three hundred thousand barrels a day, which at the time represented more than two-thirds of the high-grade crude oil produced in the Western Hemisphere. Oil companies extracted more than forty-nine million barrels (2.6 billion gallons) in 1915, with drilling centered on an area only ten miles long and three miles wide. Thirty refineries operated in the town of Cushing throughout the boom period. The field was home to the largest complex of petroleum-storage tanks in the world, covering 160 acres and containing four hundred 55,000-barrel tanks, which altogether could hold up to sixty million barrels of crude.<sup>14</sup>

Not only was the Cushing field a prolific producer, it also was built on a mosaic of racially diverse leases made up of white, Black, Indigenous, and immigrant landowners. Native royalty owners were especially prevalent in the field—upwards of 40 percent of the oil leases in Cushing faced federal restrictions based on the Indigenous “blood” of the leasing landowner. Before oil was discovered around Cushing, federal officials had allotted much of the land to “full-blood” and African Creeks, who were more likely than “mixed bloods” to oppose allotment and less likely to request a specific tract of land during allotment proceedings. The Dawes Commission arbitrarily assigned 160 acres to each of these Creeks—land that was often the least desirable from an agricultural standpoint. Many of these allottees were “conservative” Creeks who demanded the reinstatement of the original treaties that ceded Indian Territory to the Five Tribes in perpetuity. These Creeks and other “full-blood” factions formed the intertribal Four Mothers Society, which in 1906 petitioned Congress to restore past treaties that guaranteed sovereignty and lands in common. These Natives not only demanded the end of allotment, but, like Pleasant Porter, also called for the communal sharing of oil and gas. African American and African Indigenous landowners were also common in the field, with many of the latter being citizens of the Creek Nation. Finally, a number of Syrian immigrants obtained oil fortunes on land they originally purchased due to the deception of white promoters, who purposefully misrepresented its agricultural value.<sup>15</sup>

While conservative Natives had no interest in recognizing the authority of white governments in the former Indian Territory, many Indigenous land and royalty owners in the Cushing field demanded rights as citizens based on their identities as lessors.<sup>16</sup> During court proceedings, white officials, oilmen, and Native individuals labored to construct race as a legal and rhetorical concept, revealing how oil booms raised vexing questions about the rights of Native property holders to participate in the petroleum economy. The story of Thomas Gilcrease, one of a number of tribal citizens who became successful oilmen, reflected this process of race-making in the oil fields. Gilcrease was the son of a white man and a Creek woman, and as such, was assigned an allotment not far from Tulsa. Drillers sank forty-nine wells on Gilcrease's land beginning in 1906, when he was still a minor, and these wells produced upwards of twenty-five thousand barrels per month. When the original lease was due to end in 1911, the twenty-one-year-old entered into a partnership with several investors in order to keep the rigs on his land running. However, Gilcrease eventually took his partners to court, likely either because he was in debt to one of the partners or because he had received better offers from other investors. In court,

Gilcrease claimed that he was in fact incompetent, uneducated, and inexperienced in matters of business, and that as a result, the partnership should be dissolved. The defendants in the case argued that Gilcrease was in fact of “more than average intelligence,” and of “at least three years active successful experience in business.” They insisted that Gilcrease understood the oil industry—the costs and risks of drilling, as well as the laws that governed extraction. At a more fundamental level, they were proclaiming that Gilcrease was white. In effect, Gilcrease’s partners argued that the “mixed-blood” Creek man’s experience in the oil business established his identity as a white man, and thus he should not be subject to the paternalistic state and federal laws that limited the property rights of Native citizens. Gilcrease attempted to wield the legal precept of incompetency to his advantage, a strategy that “mixed-bloods” could use to obtain power within Oklahoma’s racial caste system.<sup>17</sup>

In other cases, individual Indians argued against their declared incompetency, which prevented them from direct access to the money that their oil wells produced. Martha Jackson was a “full-blood” Creek who, alongside dozens of Native and non-Native parties, claimed ownership of a Cushing-field allotment inherited from a late relative. The disputed piece of land was originally titled to Barney Thlocco, a “full-blood” Creek man who, along with numerous members of his immediate and extended family, died of an unclarified infectious-disease outbreak in January of 1899. The large number of sudden deaths within one family, and the lack of clarity over the order in which the Thloccos succumbed to the disease, made inheritance a murky question. Subsequently, there were at least 147 claimants to Thlocco’s estate, including Martha Jackson, who was Barney Thlocco’s stepdaughter and likely his nearest living relative. While many of these claims were fraudulent, many Creeks and other members of the Five Tribes maintained kin ties that could not be easily squared with Anglo-American legal tenets, which tied inheritance to nuclear families and direct “blood” relatives, which whites understood through the lens of race and skin color. The desire of white officials to manage Native land on terms acceptable to such property laws made conflicts over oil and inheritance that much more frequent and fraught.<sup>18</sup>

In 1914, an African Creek lawyer named J. Coody Johnson represented Martha, who was still a minor at the time, and her father, Saber Jackson, in court regarding the inherited allotment. In exchange for representation, Saber—who was still Martha’s legal guardian in 1914—agreed to lease part of the allotment to Johnson for the purpose of oil and gas drilling, and in collaboration with a handful of white partners, Johnson formed the Black Panther Oil and Gas Company. The Black Panther’s first well on the Thlocco allotment produced twelve thousand barrels per day, a colossal amount of oil, the daily value of which at the time was upwards of \$10,000. Indeed, the Thlocco tract quickly became one of the country’s most valuable petroleum properties. Johnson used profits from the Black Panther to settle hundreds of competing claims for the allotment, allegedly paying out a total of \$300,000 to Indian claimants. Subsequently, Martha and Saber Jackson accused Johnson of using his clout as a well-known lawyer and his “great influence” among the Creeks to declare Saber unfit to act as guardian of Martha’s now-wealthy estate. The Jacksons claimed that Johnson implored a judge to assign one of the Black Panther partners, a white man named R.W. Parmenter, to oversee Martha’s oil royalties. Johnson accused Saber Jackson of “drunkenness” and of “flirting and scheming” with regard to the allotment, and that such behavior made him unfit to manage his daughter’s affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Thomas Gilcrease, Jackson and her lawyers fought back against the notion that Martha and Saber were incompetent and incapable of administrating the oil estate. Before



the supreme court of Oklahoma, Jackson's lawyers contended that "designing and artful persons" desired to "cheat, defraud and rob" Martha of her estate and inheritance by making false claims before county judges regarding her "competence." Martha Jackson further alleged that the Black Panther owners had defrauded her of \$1.2 million over a span of four-plus years. The Jacksons' efforts partially prevailed, but not before Martha suffered a typical form of settler-colonial violence. In May of 1919, just days before her eighteenth birthday and a subsequent court hearing on her competency, unknown assailants kidnapped Jackson from the Dwight Indian Training School in Seminole County. Oil companies operating in Oklahoma frequently kidnapped Indian lessors, especially minors, in hopes of forcibly securing a signature from the allottee. Thomas Gilcrease himself was alleged to have whisked a Creek boy on the verge of gaining his majority as far as London in hopes of garnering a lease. Such kidnappings represented a violent form of Indian removal that white officials did little to stop. Despite the kidnapping and Jackson's subsequent absence from court, the county judge still declared her incompetent, arguing that Martha was well known to him and that the court had "full knowledge of [Jackson's] mental capacity." Martha Jackson survived her ordeal and eventually won \$300,000 from Black Panther. However, this represented only a quarter of what she claimed to have lost.<sup>20</sup>

Black Panther's Thlocco lease became further implicated in the problems of racial property when questions about oil monopolies and resource conservation arose around its production efforts. The protection of white petroleum businesses and the regulation of market-destroying flows of oil combined here to form a white-supremacist oil-field politics that elevated independents as the most-worthy white men in the oil game. During the early twentieth century, crises of overproduction and oil waste frequently gripped the Southwest's petroleum region, as scores of individual producers raced to capture as much oil from flush fields as quickly as possible. The result was momentous amounts of wasted crude, which ran freely down creeks, rivers, gullies, and streets, plus the collapse of oil prices due to the glut of supply. The Cushing field buckled under such conditions by early 1915. Oil slicks frequently accumulated on the Cimarron River, a tributary of the Arkansas, which flowed adjacent to the Thlocco allotment. These slicks routinely caught fire, charring and blackening the river's wooded shoreline. Economic problems accompanied the ecological fallout. Due to oversaturated markets, prices had plummeted from over a dollar a barrel to around forty cents in less than a year. At the same time, Black Panther's Thlocco lease was considered by many to be the most productive oil land in the state, valued at \$2 million, and a major contributor to the overproduction crisis. As a result, Johnson's lease became the object of scrutiny for white oilmen and public officials.

Whenever overproduction gripped a field, small producing companies bristled at the power of larger companies and alleged monopolies, such as Standard's subsidiary Prairie Oil and Gas. These latter companies often controlled pipelines that connected smaller producers to refining markets and their large-scale capitalization allowed them to weather periods of low prices when independent producers could not. When the Oklahoma Corporation Commission attempted to protect smaller companies in the Cushing field by arbitrarily inflating the price of oil, the Standard subsidiary cited Black Panther as a company that willingly sold oil at basement prices and therefore stood as proof that there was no need to artificially raise rates. Cushing's independents criticized Black Panther as "the recreant Cushing price cutter" and urged producers and oil-field workers to support the corporation commission's restrictions on sales. These oilmen believed that the corporation commission was the only bulwark preventing "one man

from ruining the business of a thousand” and wanted to prove to Black Panther’s African Creek owner that he “cannot monkey with the bread and butter of an entire industry without getting thrashed for it.”<sup>21</sup>

Beyond this kind of thinly-veiled racist language lobbed at the Black Panther company, it is difficult to say just how J. Coody Johnson’s status as a Black oilman may have played into the controversies surrounding the Thlocco lease. The oil tract was so productive that it was bound to draw the attention of the region’s oilmen and lawmakers regardless of the identity of the leasing company. However, just as anti-monopolism had been invoked to support the dissolution of Native nations, the anti-monopolists who opposed Black Panther also often participated in early Oklahoma’s anti-Black white-supremacist movements. The white men who owned small oil-producing outfits in Oklahoma tended to be members of the local upper classes, formally detached from distant sources of consolidated capital but still considerably wealthy in their own right. Many had been among the early white settlers in Indian Territory and insisted upon their worthiness as property owners and as social and political leaders vis-à-vis not only “outside” corporations but also non-white peoples, whether Indigenous, Black, or mixed race. This class of propertied white men had not only championed allotment, but had also led the establishment of Oklahoma as a Jim Crow state.<sup>22</sup>

The combined interests of white nativism and oil-field anti-monopolism were perhaps best reflected by Wash Hudson, a Tulsan and a member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Amid the problem of collapsing prices, monopolistic pipelines, and overproduction in the Cushing field in 1915, Hudson coauthored a landmark oil conservation bill that bolstered the corporation commission’s power to set oil prices, strengthened common-carrier and common-purchaser laws in the state, and, in his words, represented “the only measure that has ever been proposed in any legislature that will have the effect of putting Standard Oil, the octopus of this country, on its knees to us.” Hudson’s bill passed, garnering support from numerous independent producers whose provincial, proprietary businesses he hoped to protect from outside corporate interests. Hudson was also a founding member of the Tulsa branch of the Ku Klux Klan. Alongside an oil-industry lawyer and a petroleum engineer, he was one of five original trustees of the Tulsa Benevolent Association (TBA), a corporation established in 1922 in the wake of the Tulsa race massacre that acted as a front for the newly-formed local chapter of the Klan. By 1923, the TBA had erected a three thousand-seat Klan headquarters known as “Be-No Hall,” as in “Be No Ni\_\_\_s, Jews, Catholics or Immigrants.” Hudson’s advocacy for both anti-monopoly in the oil fields and white supremacy in Tulsa reflected the desire of white men to use local avenues of influence to distribute capitalist power and extractive wealth on their own terms, through means both legal and extralegal. Part of this strategy entailed mitigating the geological uncertainties of petroleum production by regulating drilling on independents’ terms, preventing flush oil-boom markets from destroying small-scale white enterprises. Of course, doing so meant contradicting the anti-regulatory rhetoric the same oilmen had used when eastern Oklahoma was Indian Territory. However, Hudson’s law was oil regulation enacted through the all-white, “local” state legislature that independents had always desired. White politicians such as Wash Hudson understood that regulating the flows of energy and money that coursed through the oil region was necessary for protecting the power of independent oilmen, a project that fit nicely into a larger settler-colonial regime that sought the creation of white property through the control of both Indigenous- and Black-owned land and labor.<sup>23</sup>

### “The Richest Colored Girl in the World”: Oil (Mis)fortune on Sarah Rector’s Creek Nation Allotment

The confluences of race and oil extended to the leasing of land owned by African Creeks, where the legal oversight of Indigenous citizens and Jim Crow-era whites’ assumptions about Blackness collided. Formerly-enslaved Black Creeks had been granted full citizenship in the Creek Nation as part of the tribe’s treaty with the U.S. government following the Civil War. As full tribal citizens, African Creeks received 160-acre allotments and were included on the tribal rolls, but because Black Creeks were defined as “freedmen” and not “Indians by blood,” the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) did not claim jurisdiction over their allotments. However, county and state courts as well as the Creek Nation’s lawyers took a keen interest in how the allotments of Black Creeks were handled by the many oil companies vying for leases in the Cushing field. The most famous of these African Creek allottees was Sarah Rector, who was 10 years old when the Cushing boom commenced and whose oil-rich allotment quickly garnered her international fame as “The Richest Colored Girl in the World.” As a minor and, in the eyes of whites, a racially ambiguous lessor, she and her allotment came under special scrutiny.<sup>24</sup>

Controversy surrounding Sarah Rector’s land and oil wealth blew up in 1913 as the oil boom in Cushing grew, eliciting a series of investigations into Rector’s white guardian, the Prairie Oil and Gas Company, and the Rector family itself, all of which hinged on how race, property, and the vicissitudes of oil extraction interacted. Sarah and her mother (Rose), father (Joe), and five siblings lived in a small house with a single bed located near the all-Black town of Taft, situated along the Arkansas River southeast of Tulsa. Like many Creeks, Rector did not live on her allotment, which was located sixty miles to the west of Taft, just northeast of the boomtown of Oilton. Prairie Oil and Gas drilled forty-nine producing wells on Rector’s allotment and during a five-month period in 1913 and 1914, the company paid Rector \$46,000 in royalties. In addition to drilling for crude, Prairie extracted natural gas from the property. Sarah’s father, Joe, had been the legal guardian of his children’s estates, but the great wealth that Sarah accrued from oil royalties prompted a county judge to assign a white man, J.T. Porter, to oversee the girl’s finances. Joe Rector was seemingly stripped of his guardianship for no reason other than the color of his skin. Furthermore, the voices of Sarah and her family members remain largely absent from the testimony and litigation surrounding her estate. However, a handful of reports from probate lawyers and court rooms reveal how the Rectors navigated their circumscribed wealth and maintained a semblance of control over Sarah’s estate amid the oil boom.

Joe Rector, who was a farmer, testified before a Muskogee County court that he wanted his daughter’s guardians to purchase a nearby tract of Arkansas River bottom land known as the Fish property. Rector had known the land his entire life and, due to his firsthand knowledge, was confident that the property was capable of producing a bale of cotton per acre, fifty bushels of corn, and two tons of alfalfa each growing season. He was already renting a portion of the property and at work cultivating parts of it and ensured that he would look after the land, make improvements, seek out tenants, and maintain connections with nearby markets. Joe Rector’s request can be viewed as not only an attempt to profit from his daughter’s oil royalties, but also a strategy for sinking stronger roots into the soil in the area surrounding his familial home. At the same time, Joe and Sarah’s guardian both insisted that offering portions of the land to sharecroppers would likely accrue twice as much income for Sarah’s estate as renting it for straight cash. Diversifying oil royalties into other forms of capital placed the Rectors on the winning end of the

sharecropping system, one of the Southwest's most insidious farm-labor regimes. White guardians also used oil wealth to instruct and include Black and Indigenous individuals in webs of debt and to "modernize" their Indigenous and Black Indigenous wards. Sarah could support family members using her royalties, but only in the form of loans entirely controlled by her white guardian. Rector's estate had accrued \$54,000 by mid-1914, of which \$46,000 came from oil production. Sarah's guardian J.T. Porter loaned \$42,000 of this total to various parties, including to members of his family and members of the Rector family, at an 8 percent interest rate. A new lease negotiated with Prairie in 1918 garnered the Rector estate another \$300,000, which Porter used to loan out mortgages, purchase a 452-acre farm on the Verdigris River near Tulsa, and invest \$50,000 in government bonds.<sup>25</sup>

White officials designed the guardian system in ways that quelled fears that the considerably large payouts that oil leases offered Native landowners would allow kin groups and neighbors to maintain a semblance of communal subsistence, which undermined the ultimate goals of allotment. For instance, Thomas Leahy, a county judge, wrote to the Secretary of the Interior and defended the fact that Sarah obtained only \$600 in 1913–1914, arguing that "other members of the family and neighbors" benefited from any cash paid out directly to Sarah more so than she did personally. Leahy's rationale for limiting payments to Sarah confirmed allotment's Anglo-American commitment to turning individuals into isolated economic subjects, undermining the Rectors' ability to support larger networks of kin through Sarah's oil wealth. Joe and Rose Rector allegedly objected to this norm. In 1914, a probate attorney in Muskogee wrote to Judge R.C. Allen in Washington, D.C., ensuring that Rector's parents were "of fair intelligence and apparently hard-working, industrious people." However, while Rose and Joe Rector realized that Sarah's estate was of "considerable value and that it is a growing estate," they did not fully embrace the idea that "the estate of their child is to be used wholly for [Sarah's] personal comfort and advantage."<sup>26</sup>

The management of Rector's estate by white authorities went beyond controlling oil royalties and dictating investments. Guardians and BIA officials also used oil money to transform the daily lives of the Rector family and to physically remove Sarah from her home and eventually from the Creek Nation altogether. With the discovery of oil, Leahy and the guardian "agreed upon certain changes looking toward the betterment of conditions for Sarah and the entire family." For Leahy, this meant purchasing new furniture and convincing Sarah's mother to purchase land that would become the site of a new five-room cottage. Eventually, Sarah's oil wealth proved great enough that white officials, both local and federal, sought out an elite boarding school for her to attend, laying the groundwork for her semipermanent separation from her family and their land. Indeed, she soon matriculated at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Leahy stated that her parents "strenuously objected to her leaving home at that time, she being but ten years of age." Sarah used some of her allowance to purchase a phonograph; beyond this, there's no indication that she purchased any additional personal items or gifts of her own accord.<sup>27</sup>

Sarah Rector's wealth resulted in considerable fame in both the white and Black presses. Her background as a person of both African and Indigenous heritage grew increasingly obscured, as both non-Indigenous African Americans and white Americans claimed ownership of her story and her future. In 1913, the Black newspaper *Chicago Defender* reported that white people "have become so alarmed at the enormous wealth of this young girl" that some wanted to "enamel" her or devise other methods that would allow Rector to pass as white. The paper clearly demonstrated the malleability of race

amid the oil booms when it reported that the Oklahoma legislature desired to pass a law declaring Rector a white person. "It's the same old idea of the white man," the paper continued, "that whenever a Negro achieves any distinction ... some white men want to declare them white." The Black press took a keen interest in Rector's personal safety given her growing fame and fortune. Their interest was well warranted given the fate of other oil-rich Black children. For instance, in March of 1911, William Irvin, a prominent white Muskogee landowner, dynamited the home of a Black family in Sarah's hometown of Taft, intentionally killing two children, Castella and Herbert Sells. Irvin organized the murder of the Sells children in order to gain title to their oil-rich Glenn Pool allotments. Seven men were indicted for the murders, but only Irvin and a Black accomplice who laid the dynamite were convicted.<sup>28</sup>

While the Black press positioned Sarah as an African American (but not Indigenous) child worthy of protection, the white press situated her as racially unfit to possess such a hydrocarbon inheritance. In 1914, the *Kansas City Star* described Sarah's wealth and the oil riches of other Black Creeks with animosity and factual inaccuracies that served to paint Rector as especially backward, placing her beyond the boundaries of social acceptability and declaring her and her race unfit to possess oil wealth. The paper alleged that Sarah and her sister Mannie had become rich through the possession of land inherited from their deceased parents. Sarah's parents were perfectly alive at the time, but the paper insisted otherwise, painting Sarah as "an orphan, rude, black and uneducated" and "as oblivious to the events of the world as an Eskimo." This was part of a larger exposé on non-whites who lucked upon wealth in the oil fields. The paper concluded, "[white] Oklahomans ... don't even stop to wonder at the selections Fortune makes when she picks out little darkies and immigrants on which to shower her wealth." Oilmen and other white settlers did not consider such money to be "lost," because non-white owners of oil land "will die, or someone will take it away from them and things will go back just like they were. And probably that is the correct solution of Fortune's strange caprices." In the eyes of the white press, Native American and Black wealth was an absurd, unjust coincidence of the oil fields, where immeasurable riches literally gushed from the earth. Many whites believed that the prodigious wealth that modern energy sources beckoned would inevitably and rightfully flow to the top of the racial hierarchy, regardless of the means.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion: Oil, the Tulsa Race Massacre, and the Klan

Unlike many other "full-blood" and African Creek individuals, Sarah Rector managed to live a life of relative comfort buoyed by her oil royalties. There is reason to believe that this was largely due to her fame, which brought her personal story to the attention of powerful African American activists, including Washington and W.E.B DuBois, who revealed her plight under Oklahoma's guardian system to a national audience of civil rights proponents. She and her family moved to Kansas City in 1917 where she remained throughout most of her adulthood. Rector owned real estate in the city, continued to earn royalties from oil production, and operated a car dealership. She owned a "stable of Cadillacs and Lincolns" and was reportedly a fan of joyriding around the city, especially in large, gas-guzzling automobiles. In this way, petroleum both financed Rector's wealth and fueled the freedoms that she practiced through that wealth. For so many others in Rector's position, the fact remained that both cultures of racism and a color-bounded regime of property administered by whites resulted in alienation, dispossession, and violent death. The violence surrounding petroleum and non-white people's property culminated in the

1921 Tulsa race massacre. While historians have revealed how the destruction of the Black neighborhood of Greenwood—known as “Black Wall Street”—at the hands of white rioters unfolded, few have made more than tangential connections between the massacre and Tulsa’s status as the so-called Oil Capital of the World.<sup>30</sup>

The attack on Greenwood commenced on May 31, following dubious accusations made by a young white woman that a Black elevator operator had assaulted her. However, the problems of oil wealth’s caprices simmered beneath the surface as white mobs gathered on the late-spring day. Tulsa, a major center of refining and oil-industry finance, was suffering from an oil depression at the time. A fall in prices following the end of World War I, a lack of new petroleum discoveries in Oklahoma, and the steady exhaustion of once-fecund oil tracts such as the Thlocco and Rector leases all plagued the city and surrounding rural areas. The lack of oil production further harmed landowners, who would have welcomed mineral royalties amid the growing postwar agricultural downturn. The relative economic prosperity of some Black residents only heightened the possibility of white resentment and violence. In the aftermath of the massacre, journalists and activists sympathetic to the cause of Black civil rights pointed to African American successes within the oil industry as a primary spark in initiating the white attack on Black Tulsa. James Weldon Johnson, the executive secretary of the NAACP in 1921, argued that oil fueled racial animosities in the runup to the massacre. He cited instances of Black landowners around Tulsa discovering rich oil reserves on their properties and, “because no white man would bore for them,” being forced to sell their land “at the white man’s price.” John Haynes Holmes, a white man who helped found both the NAACP and the ACLU, relayed the story of a Black family from Clearview, a community outside of Tulsa, who refused to sell their oil-rich farm despite the demands of their white neighbors. Soon after, the family of five was killed when an unknown arsonist burned down their home. For many Black Americans and their white supporters eager to assess the causes of the massacre, it was clear: if petroleum had precipitated these acts of violence, then it likely played a role in Greenwood’s destruction as well.<sup>31</sup>

The efforts of Wash Hudson and white oilmen to establish and strengthen the Ku Klux Klan in the wake of the Tulsa massacre was echoed across Oklahoma’s petroleum fields, where white-supremacist mobilizing was especially rampant. Oil towns proved to be ripe territory for migrant, non-white laborers and union activities, as well as the subsequent perception among many whites of rampant crime and vice. As a result, white vigilantism flourished in these areas. One white resident of Muskogee County, where Rector and her family lived, celebrated Klan vigilantism and concluded that white-supremacist action “certainly was born of great necessity in this oil country.” In Oilton, the boomtown adjacent to the Thlocco and Rector allotments, the local Klan built a regional headquarters that became a meeting place for several klaverns in northeast Oklahoma. One historian estimates that, among the five thousand residents of Oilton’s neighboring town of Quay, upwards of half were Klansmen during the early 1920s.<sup>32</sup>

This influx of white-supremacist power in the backyards of Indigenous and Black Indigenous allottees represented the aftermath of oil’s tumultuous rise to the top of regional and national imaginaries about race, property, and wealth. For many whites, vigilante violence was the necessary response to the numerous threats to their oil inheritance that arose via “outside” monopolies, unfit Indigenous property owners, and recalcitrant Black people. When white Americans emphasized the “windfall” that non-white peoples received due to oil abundance, they insisted upon a story of white settlement exempt from the ugly side of colonial dispossession and white-supremacist violence. Native peoples *had* been compensated, they suggested, and whatever happened afterward



was simply confirmation of Indigenous people's unreadiness for "civilization" and self-governance. The story was the same for Black people, who had further provoked white backlash by flaunting their wealth in cities such as Tulsa. And when white people insisted upon the transfer of fossil-fuel wealth from "incompetent" Indians and African Indians to white guardians, they elided questions of power and injustice by invoking the assumed efficacy of law and bureaucratic oversight. Petroleum's vexations—its great energy density accompanied by its unpredictable occurrence and habit of falling into seemingly unworthy hands—drove these cultural and institutional commitments to white supremacy in Indian Territory and Oklahoma.

## Notes

- 1 G.E. Condra, "Opening of the Indian Territory," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 39:6 (1907): 323, 337, 340 (accessed Dec. 10, 2018), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/198869>. Although Gould does not appear as an author, he is indicated as a contributor to the tract. Condra taught at the University of Nebraska while Gould founded the Department of Geology at the University of Oklahoma, laying the groundwork for one of the most important schools of petroleum geology in the twentieth-century world. See Charles N. Gould, *Covered Wagon Geologist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959); and Brian Frehner, *Finding Oil: The Nature of Petroleum Geology, 1859–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).
- 2 Patrick Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race," *American Historical Review* 106:3 (June 2001): 866–905; Wolfe, "After the Frontier: Separation and Absorption in US Indian Policy," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1:1 (2011): 13–51, DOI: 10.1080/2201473X.2011.10648800 (accessed May 11, 2019).
- 3 Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940); David A. Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832–1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 110–12, 119–20, 143–48, 176, 193–94. See also Tanis C. Thorne, *The World's Richest Indian: The Scandal over Jackson Barnett's Oil Fortune* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Katrina Jagodinsky, "Into the Void, or the Musings and Confessions of a Redheaded Stepchild Lost in Western Legal History and Found in the Legal Borderlands of the North American West"; and Brian Frehner, "Jurisdictional No Man's Land: Choctaws, Lawyers, and the Coal Question in Indian Territory" in *Beyond the Borders of the Law: Critical Legal Histories of the North American West*, Katrina Jagodinsky and Pablo Mitchell, eds. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 8, 22–23, 203–5, 212.
- 4 Kendra Taira Field, *Growing Up with the Country: Race, and Nation after the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 24–25, 74–80, 130–36. See also Donald L. Fixico, *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources*, 2nd ed., (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012); Gerald Forbes, "Oklahoma Oil and Indian Land Tenure," *Agricultural History* 15:4 (Oct. 1941): 189–94, [www.jstor.org/stable/3739783](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3739783) (accessed Dec. 10, 2018); Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); H. Craig Miner, *The Corporation and the Indian: Tribal Sovereignty and Industrial Civilization in Indian Territory, 1865–1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976); Rose Stremmler, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference."
- 5 Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 5–6, 31, 118–21; Bathsheba Demuth, "The Walrus and the Bureaucrat: Energy, Ecology, and Making the State in the Russian and American Arctic, 1870–1950," *American Historical Review* 124:2 (Apr. 2019): 487, 490–92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz239> (accessed Apr. 17, 2019); Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011); for more on energy, race, and the environment, see James Robert Allison, *Sovereignty for Survival: American Energy Development and Indian Self-Determination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014);

Sherry L. Smith and Brian Frehner, *Indians & Energy: Exploitation and Opportunity in the American Southwest* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2010); Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelands: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

6 The politics of natural-resource production and management in the United States has traditionally been written from a much different historiographical perspective than this, but those works are still worth citing. On the Progressive Era natural resource state, see Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Martin V. Melosi, *Coping with Abundance: Energy and Environment in Industrial America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Karen R. Merrill, “In Search of the ‘Federal Presence’ in the American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 30:4 (Winter 1999): 449–73, [www.jstor.org/stable/971422](http://www.jstor.org/stable/971422) (accessed July 29, 2019); Bruce J. Schulman, “Governing Nature, Nurturing Government: Resource Management and the Development of the American State, 1900–1912,” *Journal of Policy History* 17:4 (2005): 375–403, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/189747> (accessed Apr. 17, 2019); Ian Tyrrell, *Crisis of the Wasteful Nation: Empire and Conservation in Theodore Roosevelt’s America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Kyle Williams, “Roosevelt’s Populism: The Kansas Oil War of 1905 and the Making of Corporate Capitalism,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 19:1 (Jan. 2020): 96–121, DOI:10.1017/S1537781419000446 (accessed Jan. 28, 2020). Tyrrell is the only one of these authors to directly discuss race in relation to the United States’ growing overseas empire.

7 C.B. Glasscock, *Then Came Oil: The Story of the Last Frontier* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938), 112; Indian-Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections (WHC forthcoming), University of Oklahoma, Gardner Tubby interview, <https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/indianpp/id/4265>, (accessed Oct. 6, 2019); Brian C. Black, *Petrolia: The Landscape of America’s First Oil Boom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 22.

8 Kenny A Franks, *The Rush Begins* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1984), 5; Glasscock, *Then Came Oil*, 113–15; Carl Coke Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 12–24; For the environmental history of the early Pennsylvania oil fields, see Black, *Petrolia*; and Christopher F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). Jones in particular focuses on the importance of transport in the construction of a fossil-fuel energy system.

9 Wolfe, “After the Frontier,” 25–26. Henry George was an American political economist who advocated for the creation of a single tax on land as a means to alleviating growing poverty and inequality during the late nineteenth century. George argued that economic value derived from land should be collectively held. His book, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), sold millions of copies worldwide. Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 21–22; Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 247; Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 79–80, 110–11, 119–20.

10 Stremmlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*, 72–73; D.W.C. Duncan, *Vinita Chieftain*, Aug. 25, 1898, cited in Miner, *The Corporation and the Indian*, 151–53.

11 Pleasant Porter speech, in L.C. Heydrick Collection, WHC, packet 1, folder 8, unnamed, undated newspaper article, “Regrets the Finding of Oil.” The violence that was visited upon Osages due to their oil wealth is well-known. In part, this is why I do not include them in this article. The Osages also maintained reservation lands overseen by the U.S. Department of the Interior, which altered the rules of property ownership vis-à-vis other Indian Territory and Oklahoma tribes. See Terry P. Wilson, *The Underground Reservation: Osage Oil* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (New York: Doubleday, 2017); Katherine Ellinghaus, “The Moment of Release: The Ideology of Protection and the Twentieth Century Assimilation Policies of Exemption and Competency in New South Wales and Oklahoma,” *Pacific Historical Review* 87:1 (Winter 2018): 128–49, <http://phr.ucpress.edu/content/87/1/128> (accessed Oct. 19, 2019).

12 U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee. *Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with the Affairs in the Indian Territory with Hearings, November 11, 1906–January 9, 1907*. 59th Cong., 2nd sess., 1906–7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907), 164–67. For more on the divisions within the oil industry between the monopolistic “majors” and “independent” oilmen, see Darren Dochuk, *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

13 U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee. *Report of the Select Committee*, 599–600, 606–8, 618–19.

**14** On the Glenn Pool field, see W.L. Connelly, *The Oil Business as I Saw It: Half a Century at Sinclair* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954); Franks, *The Rush Begins*, 68–83, 133–35; Arthur Menzies Johnson, *Petroleum Pipelines and Public Policy, 1906–1959* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 36–42; Rister, *Oil!*; George O. Carney, *Cushing Oil Field: Historic Preservation Survey* (Stillwater: Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University, 1981), 7, 26. The significant concentration of pipelines and storage tanks in Cushing, which originated with the initial oil boom, continues today. Because of its status as an oil-transport hub, Cushing acts as the price point for North American oil futures contracts traded on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

**15** Thorne, *The World's Richest Indian*, 14, 33–35; Erik M. Zissu, *Blood Matters: The Five Civilized Tribes and the Search for Unity in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2001), 24–29, 40–49; “Joseph Bruner, Second Interview,” Indian-Pioneer Collection, WHC, <https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/indianpp/id/3456> (accessed Oct. 7, 2019), cited in Field, *Growing Up with the Country*, 44; Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 286; Ray Miles, “King of the Wildcatters”: *The Life and Times of Tom Slick, 1883–1930* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 31; “Syrian Came to Oklahoma to Garden,” *Daily Ardmoreite*, Feb. 18, 1915, 1.

**16** An example of a federally mediated oil lease between a Native allottee and an oil producer, including correspondence, can be seen online courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society, <https://www.okhistory.org/research/forms/HenryAppletreeB1F3.pdf>. See also Charles Francis Colcord Collection, WHC, box 19, folders 3 and 4.

**17** Gilcrease, Thomas vs. G.R. McCullough et al., 1914, box 40, folder 11, CCB.

**18** Proposed settlement of claim of Martha Jackson as minor heir of Barney Thlocco, deceased, May 4, 1918, box 11, folder 2, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Five Civilized Tribes Agency, Records of Tribal and Probate Attorneys, Case Files of Creek National Attorneys, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration—Southwest, Fort Worth (forthwith Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth);

**19** “Objection to Dismissal of the above Appeal,” box 31, folder 7, CCB; Memoranda in re to Martha Jackson case, Apr. 8, 1920, box 11, folder 2, Creek Nation Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth. In addition to Gilcrease and J. Coody Johnson, William Keeler acted as both principle chief of the Cherokee Nation and president of the Phillips Petroleum Company (known for the Phillips 66 brand) during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

**20** Martha Jackson et al. v. B.F. Davis, County Judge of Seminole County, Oklahoma, and R.W. Parmenter, Supreme Court for the State of Oklahoma, No. 11226, box 11, folder 2, Creek Nation Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth; Oklahoma Appellate Court Reporter, Vol. XIV, 482–83, box 11, folder 2, Creek Nation Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth; *The Petroleum Gazette* 17:1 (Apr. 1912), <https://books.google.com/books?id=iQcdAQAAMAAJ&dq=%22dana%20kelsey%22%20%22oil%22&pg=PR9#v=onepage&q=%22dana%20kelsey%22%20%22oil%22&f=false> (accessed Mar. 3, 2019).

**21** “Oil Burning on River,” *Tulsa Daily World*, Feb. 5, 1915, 10; “Prairie Trying to Force Oil down to Forty Cents,” *Sapulpa Herald*, Jan. 6, 1915, 1. All newspapers are from the Oklahoma Historical Society’s “Oklahoma Digital Newspaper Program,” <https://gateway.okhistory.org/explore/collections/ODNP/>.

**22** Two examples of this can be found in the persons of Charles Colcord and Robert Galbreath, both of whom were “unreconstructed Democrats” and early settlers and oilmen in Indian Territory and Oklahoma. See Charles Francis Colcord, *The Autobiography of Charles Francis Colcord* (C.C. Helmerich, 1970); Frank Galbreath, *Glenn Pool and a Little Oil Town of Yesteryear* (Self-published, 1978).

**23** Steve Gerkin, “The White Knight Vigilantes: Exposing the Founders of Tulsa’s KKK,” *The Frontier*, May 8, 2016, [www.readfrontier.org/stories/the-white-knight-vigilantes-exposing-the-founders-of-tulsas-kkk/](http://www.readfrontier.org/stories/the-white-knight-vigilantes-exposing-the-founders-of-tulsas-kkk/) (accessed Feb. 5, 2020); Wolfe, “Land, Labor, and Difference,” 894.

**24** For African Creeks, see Chang, *The Color of the Land*; Field, *Growing Up with the Country*; Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelveste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). For the fraught politics surrounding the inclusion of Black Indians as citizens of other nations among the Five Tribes, see Daniel Littlefield, *Seminole Burning: A Story of Racial Vengeance* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1996); Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Long, eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Miles, *Ties that Bind*; Jesse T. Schreier, “Indian or Freedman?: Enrollment, Race, and Identity in the Choctaw Nation, 1896–1907,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 42:4 (Winter 2011): 458–79, DOI: 10.2307/westhistquar.42.4.0459 (accessed Apr. 21, 2019).

**25** In the County Court in and for Muskogee County, Oklahoma, “Hearing on Valuation of Property Known as Fish property, May 1, 1917,” box 15, folder 2, Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth; WMH to Hon

R.C. Allen, June 17, 1914, box 15, folder 2, Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth; For how families in the Five Tribes navigated allotment, see Chang, *The Color of the Land*; Field, *Growing Up with the Country*; Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*. For sharecropping, tenancy, and rural poverty in Oklahoma and on the Southern Plains, see Jim Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904–1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Nigel Anthony Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905–1930* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

26 Oil companies generally offered leasing landowners a one-eighth royalty on all oil produced. Oliver Bradley, U.S. Oil Inspector, “Development and Operation,” box 15, folder 2, Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth; WMH to Hon R.C. Allen, June 17, 1914, box 15, folder 2, Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth; Charles A. Looney, Direct Examination, Dec. 5, 1918, box 15, folder 2, Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth. Judge Thomas W. Leahy, Muskogee County, to Secretary of the Interior, May 27, 1914, box 15, folder 2, Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth.

27 Judge Thomas W. Leahy, Muskogee County, to Secretary of the Interior, May 27, 1914, box 15, folder 2, Creek National Attorneys, NARA, Fort Worth.

28 *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 15, 1913, cited in “Remember Sarah Rector, Creek Freedwoman,” African-NativeAmerican.BlogSpot.com, <http://african-nativeamerican.blogspot.com/2010/04/remembering-sarah-rector-creek.html> (accessed Oct. 10, 2019); “Life Term for Child Murder,” *The Oklahoma Leader*, Feb. 4, 1915, 6.

29 *Kansas City Star*, May 14, 1914, 11–12, in box 42, “Petroleum in Oklahoma,” Historic Oklahoma Collection, WHC.

30 Steve Gerkin, “The Unlikely Baroness,” *This Land*, March, 2015, 62–63; Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002); Chris M. Messer, “The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence,” *Journal of Social History* 44:4, Social Memory and Historical Justice (Summer 2011): 1217–32, [www.jstor.org/stable/41305432](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41305432) (accessed Mar. 12, 2019); Hollie A. Teague, “Stage Rights: Performing Masculinity in the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921,” *American Studies Journal* 64 (2018), DOI: 10.18422/64-04 (accessed Jan. 2, 2020); Teague, “Bullets and Ballots: Destruction, Resistance, and Reaction in 1920s Texas and Oklahoma,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 39:2 (Spring 2019): 159–77, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/723273/pdf> (accessed Dec. 31, 2019).

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