

# Staking A Claim: The Story Of Black Indians And Oil In Oklahoma

As there are among the Creeks many persons of African descent, who have no interest in the soil, it is stipulated that hereafter these persons — and their descendants — shall have and enjoy all the rights and privileges of native citizens, including an equal interest in the soil and national funds. — **Creek treaty of 1866, developed under Auspices Cow Tom, a great-grandfather of Jake Simmons Jr. (From The Book, "Staking A Claim" by J. Greenberg)**

Did you know what is now the State of Oklahoma was once exclusively Indian territory (by treaty) after the Civil War (1866-1907)? Or that Blacks (former slaves) were considered sovereigns and protected as such in this Indian nation?

And, further, bringing the issue closer to home on Black-Indian relations, are you aware that a prime ingredient of the Seminole Indian War with the United States resulting in their refusal to move, was the fact that hundreds of runaway slaves had intermarried and were living among the tribe?

According to published reports:

## Books & Things

By Earl & Eursla Wells

"Black Seminoles encouraged the Native Americans' resentment for the encroaching Whites. Because removal would have meant enslavement for many Black tribesmen, they were willing to risk their lives to fight emigration, and convinced their red brethren to do the same."

American history is so full of contradictions and things left out, that both school children and adults have unwittingly become the victims of the tyranny of self-deception in a nation at risk because of it.

Almost every time a researcher, historian or writer chances to do an indepth review of any facet of American history that involves the Black presence, hidden passages (information here to fore unknown) emerge which open the doors to

literal interpretations as opposed to contrived propaganda.

This is also particularly true with the Native American Indian in his historical relationship with White and Black people. Nowhere in the annals of this country have such blatant omissions and distortions, which affect perception, been found than here.

A classic example of this reality can readily be seen in a new book scheduled for release this month, "Staking A Claim", by Johnathan Greenberg, Atheneum (Macmillan, Publishing Company, New York, N.Y. (19.95 h.c.).

Here is a book that deals with a subject — Blacks among American Indian Tribes — which occupies nearly a line in 98.9 tenths of the books used to teach American history to the school children in



EARL & EURSLA WELLS

America.

The book is a story in biographical form of Jake Simmons Jr. and his great-grandfather, nicknamed "Cow Tom", who, because of his intelligence and ability as an interpreter of the Indian language, rose to become the first Black chief of an Indian tribe in America.

Jake, the great-grandson, because of the legacy in both land and savvy left him by his illustrious ancestor, would later become an international tycoon considered the "most successful African-American in the history of the oil industry" in Africa and America.

Educated and trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he knew and understood well the economic theories of Booker T. Washington, which enabled him to bob-and-weave through the subterfuge of canny White businessmen to become enormously rich and powerful.

The biography has significance historically, socially and economically. Historically, because it brings to the public's attention for the first time the role played by African Americans in negotiating the interests of Native American

Indians as well as themselves; socially, and/or politically as shown in the niche they were able to carve for themselves (because of their abilities as interpreters and allies) in gaining citizenship rights among the Indians by way of treaties; and, economically, because of the astuteness of Jake Simmons in finding effective ways and means to negotiate oil leases for Blacks here and in Africa to get around unscrupulous Whites who were cheating them of their land rights.

Of equal importance in the book is the insider's view of "lost" American history involving the swap of the entire Creek Indian Nation's land in the southeastern American states for \$25,000 and a large tract of desolate land where Oklahoma now stands. This so-called treaty — negotiated by a greedy half-White chief and federal Indian agents — resulted in the Federal removal policy designed to forcibly

drive all Indians west of the Mississippi.

■ The Seminole Indian War (fought by Indians and Blacks against the U.S. Army) described as the "bloodiest war in American history." The cost to the U.S. Army was \$40 million and the lives of 1,500 soldiers.

■ The role played by Simmons as a "political pawnbroker" in securing civil rights for Blacks in Oklahoma.

■ The importance of Jake Simmons as an African American in opening up negotiations for the vast oil fields in Nigeria and other African countries.

These items and much more appear in this informative book that extends our knowledge of American history to include significant aspects of the Black experience heretofore ignored or forgotten. We recommend it highly as a resource and for pleasurable reading.

## Gibson Winners In Showcase Tuesday

Showcase performances for the 12th Annual Theodore R. Gibson Oratorical Declaration Project will be held Tuesday at 10:30 am. at Miami Dade Community College's Wolfson Campus, 300 NE 2nd Ave.

For the second consecutive year, this activity for elementary students will be a part of the celebration of Black heritage during Black History month.

The Gibson Project, named for the late Rev. Cannon Theodore R. Gibson, gives elementary students a chance to test their public speaking skills on subjects on the African American experience. Secondary students not only compete in public speaking, but also research, write and speak their written work as well.

This event is the climax of a county-wide contest in which over 500 kids participated. The project committee recognizes all kids as winners and each receives an award.

The public is invited to the ceremony to meet with winners, their parents and members of the community who support this effort.

### Unique Dress Styles

Maya villages in Mexico and Central America — cherishing 3,000-year-old traditions and crafts — still have unique styles of dress, made from brightly colored, often handwoven textiles, says National Geographic.

## Toni Morrison: Writer For All

SPRINGFIELD, Ohio — A Wittenberg University English professor has written the first book-length study of the five novels of Pulitzer-prize winning author Toni Morrison.

Terry Otten's book, "The Crime of Innocence in the Novels of Toni Morrison," was published last fall by the University of Missouri Press.

A major campaign has been launched by the Missouri Press to focus attention on what it emphasizes "will remain a valuable guide to her work as scholarship in the field gains momentum."

Morrison, one of the premier writers of the time, was awarded the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her novel "Beloved." She also has written "The Bluest Eyes" (1970); "Sula" (1974); "Song of Solomon" (1977); and, "Tar Baby" (1981).

Her works deal with the heritage and social concerns of Black Americans.

In his book, Otten traces the pervasive motif of the Biblical fall as interpreted in her work. "To survive," he writes, "her protagonists must somehow violate the rule of

burgh Press.

"The Deserted Stage" merited inclusion in the "Modern Language Association's Scholar's Library" and "Selected University Press Books."

The range of his scholarship has resulted in more than three dozen scholarly articles and chapters of books on the English Romantic poets Lewis Carroll, Robert Browning, and modern writers including Ibsen, Albee, Camus, Hesse, Faulkner, Shaw and others.

He has produced numerous book reviews and critiques for learned publications, university presses and book publishers.

His ability as a scholar is matched by his ability as a teacher. He has been selected as one of the nation's top college professors by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. In 1975, after only nine years on the faculty, he was at age 37 the youngest ever recipient of the Alumni Association Award for Distinguished Teaching.

# GO FOR THE 'O'