Assimilation, Separation, and Out-Migration in an American Indian Group

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The alternative strategies of assimilation, separation, or out-migration which face most rural minority populations are discussed in light of the Mississippi Choctaw experience. Existing in a local society dichotomized between White and Black, the Choctaw response has been similar to that of mestizo groups described by Berry. A combination of employment opportunity, White attitudes, and community size seem to determine which strategy will predominate in a given Choctaw community.

DISCUSSIONS of American minority groups today emphasize two divergent trends. One trend is toward increased assimilation or integration of minority groups into national life. By both legal action and informal social change, members of minority groups are increasingly allowed free participation in the diverse institutions of the dominant group from which they were previously wholly or partly excluded. In particular, change has been noted in economic, educational, and political institutions. At the same time, there is a growing trend for members of minority groups to emphasize the preservation and strengthening of separate ethnic communities through what Gordon (1964:35) has called, "ethnically enclosed" institutions which separate one ethnic group from another. It has long been the position of anthropology that basic social processes can be more clearly delineated through detailed studies of limited populations. The 3600 Choctaw Indians of Mississippi, as a small isolated and locally relevant ethnic group, provide an ideal opportunity for understanding how these divergent trends of assimilation and separation can function at the local level. Before examining the operation of these trends in contemporary Choctaw communities, however, it is necessary briefly to examine the relationship of Choctaws to non-Choctaws as it existed in the past and to some extent, continues to exist today.

CHOCTAW HISTORY

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, as they are legally known, are descendants of those Choctaws who chose to remain in Mississippi during the period of Indian removals of the early nineteenth century. Their forefathers either failed to receive land in Mississippi as provided under the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek of 1830 (DeRosier 1970:174-184) or lost possession of land they did receive under the treaty provision allowing them to remain in Mississippi. Many dispossessed Choctaws moved to Oklahoma during the following decades (Debo 1934:69-71), but between one and two thousand Choctaws remained in their traditional homeland in the sand-clay hills of east central Mississippi. Here they avoided removal by remaining as squatters on less desirable land unoccupied by White settlers, forming a small minority in a society dominated by Whites and composed largely of Whites and Negroes.

Accordingly, the constant struggle to maintain their separate ethnic identity has been the dominant theme of Choctaw history (Peterson 1970b:274). Prior to Reconstruction, the Choctaws occupied the locally incongruous position of being defined as non-White, but being non-slave. As such, there was no established position for them in a local society based on White landowners and landless Negro slaves. Participation in
any of the institutions of the dominant society required that Choctaws either accept the position of slaves or that they acquire land and be accepted as White. The latter alternative was impossible, and the former was unacceptable to the Choctaws who remained in almost total social isolation until the end of the slave system.

Following the Civil War, the sharecropping system replaced the slave system, and agricultural workers were no longer dichotomized as landless slaves or landowning freemen. Some Whites as well as most Negroes began working for shares on agricultural land owned by Whites. Since cultural work for others was no longer limited to Negro slaves, it was possible for Choctaws to participate as sharecroppers in the economy of the dominant society for the first time without sacrificing their ethnic identity. This degree of economic assimilation was not accompanied by assimilation into other activities of the dominant society, but rather by parallel development of new ethnically enclosed institutions. During Reconstruction, Negroes separated from White churches and established their own Negro churches. When public education was established for the first time, separate White and Negro schools were likewise established (Wharton 1965). Choctaws followed this development by establishing first their own Choctaw churches (Farr 1948) and later participating in separate Choctaw schools (Langford 1953). The development of these two new ethnically enclosed institutions was possible only because of Choctaw assimilation into the economy of the dominant society. If the Choctaws had not moved into sharecropping, their communities would have been disrupted and scattered as an expanding local population brought increasing amounts of marginal land under cultivation.

Choctaw sharecropping made possible the development of stable Choctaw communities patterned more directly after White and Negro rural communities, but remaining distinctively and exclusively Choctaw. This development had been underway some twenty years, when in 1903, the Federal Government made a second attempt to remove the Choctaws to Oklahoma as part of the Dawes Commission's work in preparing Oklahoma for statehood (Debo 1934:273-275). However, many Choctaws again refused to leave Mississippi, and many who did leave later returned. Recognizing the failure of removal efforts, the Bureau of Indian Affairs began working with the Choctaws in 1918 (Bounds 1964:55-62).

The establishment of the Choctaw Agency furthered the development of the separate Choctaw communities that had begun in the 1880s. A land purchase program facilitated a greater concentration of the Choctaw population as some more isolated sharecroppers were able to move into one of the seven Choctaw communities and begin farming trust land. The population concentration enabled greater numbers of Choctaw children to attend one of the Choctaw schools established in each community. A health program not only brought better medical aid to the Choctaws, but also resulted in a separate Choctaw hospital.

While the Choctaw Agency's programs improved Choctaw living conditions, in the past the lack of funds for fully implementing the Agency's programs resulted in little fundamental change in the pattern of life within the Choctaw communities (Jennings, Beggs, and Caldwell 1945). The land purchase program remained small, forcing the majority of Choctaws to continue to earn a living through sharecropping. Even those Choctaws farming trust land were dependent on the cotton economy. The lack of a Choctaw high school prior to 1964 resulted in most Choctaw students receiving only a basic elementary education which did not prepare them for non-agricultural work. Furthermore, Choctaws were generally denied the few non-agricultural jobs that did exist in the local area (Moore and Steve 1963:6-7). Lacking both necessary skills and knowledge about life outside the Choctaw communities, there was relatively little out-
migration (Peterson 1970a:5). Consequently, most Choctaws remained, until recently, marginal farmers in isolated rural communities, where they continued to have only limited contact with Whites or Negroes.

RELATIONS WITH NON-CHOCTAWS

The status of the Mississippi Choctaws in local society was and is generally similar to that described by Berry (1963:30) for mestizo groups in the South. The marginal position of the Choctaws does not stem from the “mixed blood” characteristic of the mestizo groups, but rather from the fact that they, like the mestizos, do not belong to either of the two locally relevant ethnic groups, Negroes and Whites. Both the Choctaws and the mestizos form a third social group attempting to maintain its existence in a local society whose social relations are based on a clearcut recognition of only two ethnic groups.

While local Whites recognize that Choctaws are Indians, not Negroes, Choctaws are still locally defined as non-White. Choctaws are denied service in most local White eating establishments and all White beauty and barber shops. Until recently, Choctaw children were not admitted to White schools, and Choctaws are still not allowed to attend local White churches. Where they are denied White status and the right to participate in White institutions or use White facilities, the Choctaws have the choice of using Negro facilities and thereby accepting non-White status, or remaining to themselves and thereby maintaining their status as neither White nor Negro, but Choctaw.

Wherever possible, the Choctaws consistently chose the latter alternative, thereby maintaining their separate ethnic status in the local area. Legally (Choctaw Agency n.d.:10) almost all Choctaws are classified as “full blood.” In those rare cases where Choctaw/non-Choctaw marriages take place, the couple is most often married outside the Choctaw area, or finds it expedient to move outside the area where they assimilate into the ethnic group of the non-Choctaw partner. Children of these marriages are rarely entered on tribal rolls, but rather remain with the ethnic group of the non-Choctaw parent. The lack of contact with non-Choctaws is further indicated by the fact that English was the predominant language in less than seven percent of Choctaw households in 1968.4

It should be recognized, however, that there is much individual variation in Choctaw/non-Choctaw relations. As Berry (1963:55) observed for the mestizo, the attitudes of Whites toward this third ethnic group are often contradictory. In general, Choctaws are most likely to be classified as non-White in Neshoba County where the concentration of Choctaws is greatest, making up approximately five percent of the population. In the counties to the west and south, where the Choctaws comprise less than two percent of the population, Choctaws are more likely to be given more of the rights and privileges of Whites. Well away from the Choctaw area, it is possible for individual Choctaws to be given full White status.

AGRICULTURAL CHANGE AND OUT-MIGRATION

Within the past ten years, however, changes in the larger society threatened the agricultural basis of Choctaw society that was established in the 1880s. These changes reflect a basic shift in the pattern of life in east central Mississippi stemming from the decline of small farming operations, the expansion of large dairying, poultry and lumbering operations, and the development of smaller manufacturing enterprises in the towns of the area (Neshoba County Rural Development Association 1962, 1967). The impact of these changes on the population of the area is indicated by the 18.7% decline in the total population and a 25.2% decline in the rural population of Neshoba County from 1950 to 1960. During the same period, there was a 61.1% decline in agricul-
tural jobs and a 37.8% increase in non-agricultural jobs. By 1965, the continued expansion of non-agricultural jobs had curbed out-migration to the extent that the population as a whole remained fairly stable between 1960 and 1970.

This pattern of loss of agricultural jobs, resulting in out-migration, followed by increased non-agricultural jobs, resulting in less out-migration, did not initially affect the Choctaw population. From 1950 to 1960, while the population of Neshoba County was declining, the Choctaw population in Neshoba County increased 12.8%. But during the early 1960s, the trends earlier observed in the non-Choctaw population became observable in the Choctaw population.

The continuing decline in profits from small farming operations, especially cotton production, resulted in less need for sharecroppers. As a result, many older Choctaw sharecroppers became dependent on welfare or subsisted through seasonal agricultural day labor. Younger Choctaw sharecroppers more often shifted to wage jobs in larger agriculturally related operations such as poultry, dairying, or lumbering, or sought better job opportunities through out-migration. Between 1962 and 1968, the percentage of Choctaw heads of household classified as farmers declined from 31.6% to 8.9%, and those classified as agricultural day laborers declined from 16.7% to 10.2%. Out-migration was encouraged through the establishment of relocation services by the Choctaw Agency in 1957 and made more feasible by the better education received by younger Choctaws, their greater familiarity with the English language, and their increased knowledge of opportunities outside the Choctaw area. After the establishment of the Choctaw High School in 1964, increasing numbers of Choctaw high school graduates left the area to attend colleges and technical schools or to serve in the armed forces. Choctaws initially did not benefit from the expansion of non-agricultural jobs in new local industries because of job discrimination. A few Choctaw women were hired on a temporary basis in a local manufacturing plant in 1953, but were released following protest by White workers (Tolbert 1958:236). Being almost totally dependent on agriculturally related jobs, the Choctaw population faced the need for expanded out-migration as this source of jobs declined.

Unlike the Lumbee (Peck 1969), Choctaw out-migration did not tend to be directed toward a single urban center, but rather resulted in general population dispersal. Chicago and Dallas were the only cities receiving a significant number of Choctaw migrants. A larger number of migrants settled in cities and towns in Mississippi outside the Choctaw area, in the adjacent states of Florida, Louisiana, and Tennessee, and in the more distant states of California, Ohio, and Oklahoma. Where there was a local urban Indian population, Choctaws tended to settle near this group, but in other areas they tended to become assimilated into the larger population. In either case, out-migration threatened the continued existence of separate Choctaw speaking communities in Mississippi. With the loss of younger Choctaws in the child-bearing years, in time the Mississippi Choctaw communities might have declined and disappeared as have the Louisiana Choctaws and the Choctaws of the lower Pearl River in Mississippi.

LOCAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES EXPAND

Two important changes in the mid 1960s brought about greater local job opportunities for Choctaws, reducing the necessity for out-migration and thereby increasing the stability of separate Choctaw communities. First, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights law, and especially those provisions affecting fair employment practices, opened the doors of local industries to Choctaws. Even before the law went into effect, local manufacturing plants that had previously not hired Choctaws began to actively solicit Choctaw workers. As these initial workers proved satisfactory employees, industrial employment of Choctaws expanded. A
second change was the great increase in funding level for programs operated by the Choctaw Agency and the Choctaw Tribal Council. The Community Action Program initiated by the Tribal Council in 1966 was especially important in creating, for the first time, a number of professional and managerial positions for Choctaws. As a result, alternatives became available for Choctaws who preferred not to leave the Choctaw communities but who were not content with traditional agricultural jobs.

The percentage of Choctaw heads of households engaged in non-agricultural wage jobs increased from 23.8% in 1962 to 44.6% in 1968 with the greatest change occurring since 1964. During the same period the percentage of Choctaw homemakers employed in non-agricultural wage jobs increased from 4.3% to 17.7%. The lack of reliable statistics on the size of the Choctaw population prior to 1966 makes it difficult to judge the extent to which improved job opportunities have affected total out-migration, but there is a definite increase in return migration by Choctaws who have long been absent from the Choctaw area.

ASSIMILATION OR SEPARATION

As with the transition from squatters to sharecroppers, the movement of Choctaws into new occupational categories in predominantly White industries represents a greater assimilation of Choctaws into the economy of the dominant society. But in both instances, assimilation into economic activities made possible continued or increased separation from the dominant society in other activities. As long as the Choctaws were dependent upon farming for their livelihood, they were forced to live in a dispersed settlement pattern, farming individual plots on trust land and in the rural areas surrounding Choctaw trust land. Wage jobs freed the Choctaw sharecroppers from the necessity of living on the land they farmed under the close supervision of the non-Choctaw landlord. In some cases, this resulted in Choctaws securing better housing in areas outside the Choctaw communities. A few Choctaws have even been able to get housing in formerly all-White areas in some of the towns on the western and southern edges of the Choctaw area where attitudes on the part of Whites towards Choctaws are somewhat more open. On the other hand, wage jobs permitted an increasing concentration of Choctaws on or adjacent to trust land. Between March, 1966, and December, 1968, the population located on trust land increased 10.9% even though there was no change in population size during this period. A massive housing program on trust land is resulting in further increases in the population living on trust land and a decrease in population living in rural areas away from trust land. As a result, although Choctaw wage earners are working more closely with non-Choctaw wage earners in local factories, an increasing number of Choctaw families are living in predominantly Choctaw communities where their interaction with non-Choctaws has decreased. For Choctaws employed in tribal enterprises, their work as well as their family life is increasingly centered in a predominantly Choctaw setting.

Thus, participation of Choctaws in local factories represents an increased assimilation of Choctaws into the economic institutions of the dominant society, but it also permits an increased separation of Choctaws from non-Choctaws in non-economic activities. This may be contrasted with out-migration to jobs outside the Choctaw area which forced the Choctaws to participate in either a predominantly White social setting or a non-Choctaw urban Indian setting, in either case weakening the continued existence of separate Choctaw communities in Mississippi.

COMMUNITY DIFFERENCES

The impact of new job opportunities for Choctaws did not affect the different Choctaw communities equally. Industrial jobs were located in or adjacent to several small
towns in the area. As a result, there was a
differential out-migration pattern from
Indian communities located at varying dis-
tances from available wage jobs. Out-
migration was greatest in those communities
most distant from established industries.
This out-migration from the more isolated
Choctaw communities was partially directed
toward areas outside the Indian communi-
ties, but it was also in part directed toward
Choctaw communities located closer to
available jobs. As a result, the out-migration
from some communities was offset by in-
migration from other Choctaw communities.
The current expansion of housing on trust
land will accentuate this trend as houses are
constructed primarily in Choctaw com-
communities nearest available wage jobs.

Proximity to wage jobs alone, however,
does not account for all the differences in
population trends between the Choctaw
communities. Two other factors seem to be
involved: community size and attitude of
the surrounding population toward Choc-
taws. Regardless of availability of jobs, the
smaller Choctaw communities suffer a
greater percent of population loss since they
are less able to provide the services,
especially schools, that are provided by the
larger Choctaw communities. As a result,
Choctaws from the smaller communities are
more likely to migrate to larger Choctaw
communities, or to move away from the
Choctaw communities altogether.

The attitude of the surrounding White
population seems related to the type migra-
tion Choctaws will undertake. Where the
White population continues to consider the
Choctaws non-White, Choctaws are more
likely to migrate to larger Choctaw com-
unities, or out of the general area al-
together. Where Whites are more willing to
accept Choctaws as equals, Choctaws are
more likely to secure housing outside the
traditional communities and even send their
children to White schools.

Detailed analysis of the seven Choctaw
communities indicates how a combination of
these factors of availability of wage jobs,
size, and White attitudes have combined to
contribute to the trends found in the Choc-
taw communities between 1966 and 1968.
The four smallest Choctaw communities
with populations of less than 500 people
each are all declining in population. Two of
these communities with the population
losses of over twenty percent represent al-
most opposite conditions in terms of both
White attitudes and available jobs. The com-

munity with the best nearby job opportuni-
ties and more general acceptance of Choc-
taws by the White population shows the
greatest movement of Choctaws into the
general population. In this community, all
Choctaw children attend White schools. The
community with poorer job opportunities
located in an area with more negative White
attitudes shows more movement from the
general area or into nearby Choctaw com-

munities. The other two small communities
have a population loss of only six percent
and are located in areas where White at-
titudes toward Choctaws are more positive.
Although the percent of population loss in
the two communities is almost identical, the
community with poorer local job op-
portunities shows a loss of males in all age
categories below sixty-five, while the com-

munity with better local job opportunities is
gaining in males in all age categories above
thirty-five.

The three remaining Choctaw com-

munities have populations in excess of 500
people. One of these, located furthest from
good job opportunities in an area with the
most negative attitude toward Choctaws on
the part of surrounding Whites shows a
population decline of twenty percent. A
second community has better than average
job opportunities available, but is also
located in an area where White attitudes
toward Choctaws are negative. This com-

munity is showing the greatest gain in popu-
lation of all Choctaw communities. Within
the past five years, this community has
changed from a scattered farming com-

munity to what might be called a small
town. All signs indicate that this trend is
accelerating, and will continue to accelerate
if job opportunities keep pace. The remain-
ing Choctaw community has above average job opportunities locally, but exists in an area where White attitudes toward Choctaws are more positive. It is showing a slight population gain, but Choctaws in this community are more likely to have housing in the local area away from the general Choctaw community.

**DETAILED COMPARISON**

The differences in the seven Choctaw communities can be better appreciated by contrasting in more detail one of the most traditional Choctaw communities and one of the least traditional communities. The differences between these two communities are all the more striking since they are the two largest Choctaw communities and are both located in the same county.

The center of the more traditional community of Bogue Chitto is located in the eastern edge of Neshoba County on a poorly graveled road about five miles from the nearest paved highway. Almost forty-five percent of the households are engaged in farming, primarily as sharecroppers. Since the amount of trust land is very limited in this community, members of the community are scattered on White-owned land over portions of three counties. At the heart of the community, the casual passerby would note a small brick elementary school, a boarding dormitory, and a few houses in the immediate vicinity. He would have no other sign that he was passing through the second largest Choctaw community in Mississippi.

In this community, sixty-eight percent of the heads of households have less than one year of education, and the modal cash income is less than $2000 per year. Most families live in two or three room frame shacks.

The poorly maintained dirt roads not only isolate individual Choctaw farmers from each other, but also make it very difficult in winter for members of this community to commute to factory jobs in nearby towns even if they do possess the necessary education and job skills. Younger Choctaws from this community who acquire anything beyond a minimum of education must choose to follow the declining agricultural way of life, to leave the Choctaw area altogether, or to migrate to another Choctaw community. It is not surprising that most choose the second or third alternative, and Bogue Chitto has the highest percentage of out-migration of any of the larger Choctaw communities.

The Choctaw community to which many Bogue Chitto Choctaws have chosen to move is Pearl River. Fifteen years ago, the external appearance of the Pearl River community was quite similar to that of Bogue Chitto today. Today, however, Pearl River is the third largest town in Neshoba County. At the center of the community is a modern elementary school serving this community, and an equally large high school and boarding dormitory serving all Choctaw communities. The new Tribal Office building and the neighborhood facility building are the center of a greatly expanded tribal business, educational, and administrative activities. Adjacent to this complex is a modern housing development with individual homes and multi-family housing spaced among the pine trees along paved streets. The community is immediately adjacent to a major paved highway providing easy access to industrial jobs in nearby towns. The various tribal operations also provide many people with jobs in the community. Only fourteen percent of households in Pearl River are engaged in farming. Almost twenty-three percent of heads of households are employed as managers, foremen, or in service occupations, as compared with only three percent in Bogue Chitto. The modal household income is over $5000 in Pearl River. More Choctaw high school and college graduates live in Pearl River than all the other Choctaw communities together. Pearl River offers modern living facilities, occupational and educational opportunities not available in other Choctaw-speaking communities, thus alleviating the necessity of Choctaws leaving
their communities to seek these advantages in non-Choctaw communities. As a result, Pearl River is experiencing the greatest growth of any of the Choctaw communities.

SUMMARY

In summary, where job opportunities are lacking and Choctaws continue to hold predominantly agricultural jobs, or where the Choctaw community is too small to provide desired services, Choctaw out-migration tends to be greatest. Where greater job opportunities are located near the Choctaw community, and the community is large enough to provide desired services, the population is likely to increase. Better job opportunities make it possible for individual Choctaws to move toward assimilation into the general population, or to establish closer ties geographically and socially with other Choctaws. Assimilation is more likely to occur away from the center of the Choctaw area where Whites are more willing to give Choctaws some of the prerogatives of White status. Continued or increased separation is more likely to occur where Whites are less willing to give Choctaws such prerogatives. Where there are adequate job opportunities and community services, there is some indication that separation continues to be preferred to assimilation. The striking aspect of recent social change among the Mississippi Choctaws lies in the operation of these divergent trends in such a limited social and geographical area. While there is some danger in generalizing from a specific group to the larger society, the current trends in the Choctaw communities seem to follow the pattern of trends in minority-majority group relations in the wider society. Lack of job opportunities in rural areas is a major factor in rural depopulation in the United States. Better job opportunities can curb rural out-migration and make possible a change in the relationships of minority group members to members of the dominant ethnic group. However, job opportunities alone do not determine whether this changing relationship will lead to greater assimilation of minority groups into the local society, or will result in increased separation and a greater strengthening of the minority ethnic group community. This would seem to depend more on the openness of the local society and the degree to which members of minority groups are granted the prerogatives of members of the dominant ethnic group.

NOTES

1 Data for this article were collected through three related studies by the author. A Phelps-Stokes Fellowship in Sociology and Anthropology provided by the University of Georgia made possible continuous fieldwork in the Choctaw communities of Mississippi from July, 1968, to July, 1969. Participant observation and interviewing of both Whites and Choctaws during this period provide the basis for statements about relationships between Choctaws and non-Choctaws. During this period, a total tribal survey was undertaken by the author and the Choctaw Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Analysis of this data by the author was made possible through support provided by the Research Coordinating Unit for Vocational Education, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University. Summary data from this study has been published (Peterson 1970a), and this report together with yet unpublished data from the tribal survey provide the basis for descriptive statistics on the contemporary Choctaw population. Finally, a historical study of the Mississippi Choctaw population was carried out to provide confirmation and additional time depth to observations made during the 1968-1969 period (Peterson 1970b).

2 The 1960 census indicated that Choctaws lived in sixty-one of Mississippi's eighty-two counties, but eighty-three percent of the Choctaw population of Mississippi lived in an eight county area in which were located the seven major Choctaw communities. Data in this paper, unless otherwise stated, apply only to Choctaws in the following counties: Winston, Noxubee, Leake, Neshoba, Kemper, Scott, Newton, and Jones. These counties constitute what will be referred to as the Choctaw area.

3 The impact of changed Negro status on the status of marginal groups in the South deserves far more attention. Choctaw acculturation seems definitely related to changes
in Negro status, especially following the Civil War. The same pattern is implied in Hudson’s (1970:70) observation that the isolation of mestizo groups in the Southeast began to break down following the Civil War and that the same was true for the Catawba Indians. It would seem that changes in the status of a marginal group can be best understood in light of changes in the total local society. One would, therefore, hypothesize that changes in the status of marginal groups would most often occur during or following changes in the relationship of the major ethnic groups. This hypothesis is examined in more detail elsewhere (Peterson 1971).

Statistics on the Choctaw population in 1968 are based on the survey of the Choctaw population mentioned above in note 1. More detailed statistics will be found in Peterson (1970a). Data on the Choctaw population prior to 1968 are based on two unpublished surveys of the Choctaw population: a 1962 survey undertaken by the Choctaw Agency in cooperation with Dr. Wilfrid C. Bailey of the University of Georgia, and a 1966 survey undertaken by the Branch of Employment Assistance, Choctaw Agency.

The four surveys of the Choctaw population taken within the last ten years should provide an ideal basis for determining Choctaw out-migration. However, both the 1960 census and the 1962 survey present a definite under-enumeration of the Choctaw population, while the 1966 and 1968 surveys by the Choctaw Agency seem to have more successfully located Choctaw families in the immediate Choctaw area. As a result, a simple comparison of 1960 census figures with the 1966 survey would indicate that the Choctaw population increased over seventeen percent in only six years, a rate higher than that of preceding years, although Agency records indicate out-migration increased during this period. As a result of the apparent inaccuracy of earlier data, I have used the Choctaw Agency surveys of March, 1966, and December, 1968, in determining trends in different Choctaw communities. While these two surveys indicate that the total Choctaw population increased by only six persons during this period, there were marked changes among the different communities as indicated in this paper. While it is difficult to determine the exact extent of Choctaw out-migration, the impact of this out-migration is apparent from the changes in the sex and age composition of the Choctaw population from 1962 to 1968. The percentage of males in the population declined in all age categories between ten and forty-nine, with the greatest loss in the ages twenty to twenty-nine. There has been no decline in the percentage of females of any age, resulting in an unbalanced sex ratio, especially among young adults. It appears that out-migration is continuing, especially for the increasing number of Choctaw high school graduates for whom there are still only a limited number of suitable local jobs.

There is a definite increase in return migration by Choctaws who have long been absent from the Choctaw area. In 1962, 87.5% of Choctaws returning from relocation, returned within two years. In 1968, only 43.7% of returnees returned within two years, and 21.1% of returnees were returning after being absent from the Choctaw communities six or more years. This fact would seem to indicate a clear preference for life in the Choctaw communities if suitable jobs are available.

REFERENCES CITED

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In order to bring the study of bi- and tri-mixed racial groups in America and elsewhere into the general body of racial theory, it is suggested that such groups be considered “little races.” From this point of view, considerations having to do with “racialization” and “de-racialization” may find a place in a larger frame of reference along with tribalization, detribalization, and processes leading to group differentiation generally. The little races are marginal groups, but not necessarily aggregations of marginal men. They are made aware of themselves as marginal groups as they become objects of scurrilous epithets thrown at them by larger neighboring racial groups. This leads to a search for a name of dignity, a name inherited from “pure” and honorable ancestors. A number of such origin myths are mentioned. Modern ecological, economic, political, and social changes threaten the future of the little races.

EUGENE GRIESSMAN and the contributors to this series are directing our attention to a significant body of social phenomena which, so far, in spite of a fair amount of literature, have been only slightly utilized in our continuing search for the nature and meaning of the social, the racial, and the simply human. They are asking us to pay more attention to the comparative study of race relations and of the significance of the “little races” of the earth in such study. For social science is possible only on the