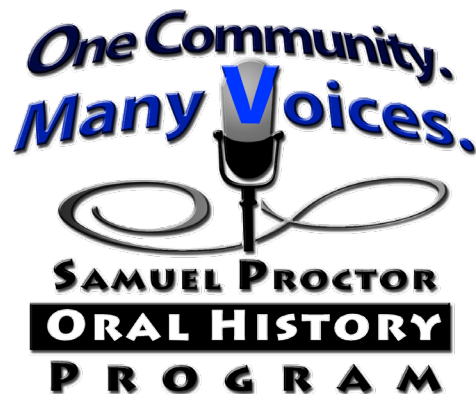


Benny McGhee

**Poarch Creek Project
CRK-036**

Interview by:

**Dr. J. Anthony Paredes
January 27, 1973**



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CRK 036 Benny McGhee
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
Interviewed by J. Anthony Paredes on January 27, 1973
1 hour, 3 minutes | 30 pages

Abstract: Benny McGhee recalls what it was like to grow up in Escambia county in the 1940s and 1950s. He speaks about prejudice in school he faced and describes childhood activities, from pastimes such as hunting to his work picking cotton. He recalls how he got football in school, and the influence his coach had on him. He then speaks about his trips driving Chief Calvin McGhee to Washington to trace peoples' lineages, and reflects on Calvin's goals of getting recognition for the Creek Indians. Benny discusses his hopes for the future of the community and discusses the influence churches have had in recent years. Finally, he reflects on intermarriage between White and Indian people.

Keywords: [Poarch Band of Creek Indians; Chief Calvin McGhee; Discrimination; Activism]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CRK-036

Interviewee: Benny McGhee

Interviewer: Dr. J. Anthony Paredes

Date of Interview: January 27, 1973

P: This is January 27, 1973, and I'm in the home of Benny McGhee, interviewing Benny McGhee. Benny, how old are you?

M: Thirty-four.

P: What I'd like for you to do, since I've talked to mainly older people, I'd like for you to just begin reminiscing and talk about what it was like to grow up as an Indian in Escambia County in the 1940s and [19]50s when you grew up . . . First of all, as you were growing up, were you aware of being Indian, or that Indians were any different or treated any different than anybody else?

M: Well, in the early part of my life I wasn't aware of being an Indian. I meant from—I guess in first and fifth grades, I guess I was. In a way, I was—well, I knew we had an Indian school that the Indians went to, first through sixth grade. I never was fully aware as of white people or Caucasian, whatever you wanna call them. I was against differentiation of against a different race of people until I got in high school. I know, when I first started in high school, and I guess it was in 1950, [19]50 or [19]51—no, I take that back—[19]57 . . . Well, I'll take it back, I looked in delving into the first time when I don't even remember what the year was, it was in the [19]50s, I guess. So when I first went into high school, Escambia County High School in Atmore, as the people was. I knew my dad, my uncle, several of them had to be stop buses to put us on the bus to go to high school. But I guess I was too young to really know what the full meaning of it. After I got on up into ninth or tenth—ninth grade, I guess it was, well, then people started accepting us because we had Uncle Calvin, the chief of the Creek Nation

at that time, had got a petition against the government. Got a lot of money was supposed to be paid off and then the whole state, I guess, a lot of them became Indians at that time. [laughter]

P: When you first went to high school what was it like with the other students at the high school and your relationship with them?

M: First, in high school, I don't know if you call seventh grade high school or not?

P: Well, junior high school.

M: Junior? It was poor relation at the start off with.

P: In what ways? What were some of the things?

M: I mean, I was a dark person. Still am. And they couldn't accept me 'cause I wasn't white, I guess. I mean, it was a poor relation. Some of the teachers, I mean most of the teachers, were cordial and they were nice. But, whereas the peoples, the students and things, I don't guess they had ever been around a really dark person that one would consider a Negro. They had a lot of maids, they had maids, they knew what Negroes were, and they were dark people. I don't know what they own opinion of the Indian people was.

P: Before you came into Atmore, to school, just playing and stuff, did you have much interaction with kids other than Indian kids?

M: No, I didn't. Did not.

P: You never had, say, a white playmate before you came to school, that you can think of?

M: No, I can't. I don't think I can remember.

P: When you were real small—

M: I wouldn't say a full-blood Indian or full-blood white, I mean, they was mixed. But they were considered Indian at that time.

P: When you were real small, how often did you get into the town of Atmore, would you say?

M: . . . Now what ages, I mean . . . ?

P: Before you started the seventh grade, say, when were out in Poarch growing up out there, how often did you come to town?

M: Not too often. I want say that . . . I really can't remember how often we came to town, to be honest with you.

P: Did you go to movies much at all?

M: Yeah. Oh, used to come in on a Saturday, pay a dime, and go and sit in there all day. Which you can't do now.

P: Other than doing that, back when you were real small, what kind of things did kids out in Poarch do for fun?

M: Well . . . me, say myself and Houston McGhee, Raymond McGhee, Ray McGhee, we went back and we hunted a lot. We'd hunt from all weekend, sling shot, bow and arrow, which we made. And on the weekend, that was the biggest thing, killing birds we used to chase, there used to be three or four birds we used to chase all the time. Thrasher, joree, and we ever hit one of them, we'd chase them all day to kill it. And we stayed on the creeks up in **Weather Creek**, we stayed there, I guess every weekend, camping.

P: Where was that?

- M: It's . . . be north of Atmore, up [inaudible]. We'd stayed up there every weekend on the **Dan Creek**, fishing.
- P: You mentioned joree. Is that a kind of bird, or—
- M: Yeah, that's a bird.
- P: What's it called?
- M: A joree.
- P: Joree? What does it look like?
- M: It's a black bird and it's got a orange neck on it, kind of look like a robin but it's not quite as big as a robin, it's got white tips on each wing.
- P: Did you all kill them just to be killing them or did you ever eat any?
- M: We roasted them.
- P: Did you?
- M: Yes, sir. Got some fire, stuck sticks through them and roasted them. Quite a few times.
- P: Did y'all do much fishing at that time?
- M: Yes, sir, we did. We fished up on **Wet Weather Creek**, got catfish and a few fish eels. Raymond was real scared of fish eels, catch one of them things and chase him all night with it.
- P: [laughter] Now what, a fish eel?
- M: Yeah.
- P: Are they good to eat?
- M: People say they are. I have never ate one, they say that's some of the best meat there is, but I never ate one of them. You catch them on the rivers now.

P: When you were growing up, which was not too many years ago, did kids, even at that time, have a lot of work to do out there?

M: On the farm they did.

P: Did you live on a farm?

M: I lived on a farm. I lived with Chief Calvin McGhee. We had a lot of work to do, picking cotton. How it started off was, you broke land, you planted your crop, you gather your crop. Cotton, corn, wasn't too much soil—beans, for one, at the earliest part of my time. We did a lot of truck farming. Basically, I do a lot of truck farming. That's growing vegetables and stuff like that. Which was—we did real well on it. But there is a lot of work on a farm. We'd milk our own cows, we done all the milking. We had four or five cows, I guess, we milked and—

P: Did you ever go off and work in picking cotton sales somewhere else for other people besides your own relatives?

M: Yeah.

P: What was the pay like at that time?

M: I think, when I first started—picking cotton as best I can remember, I think we was getting about a dollar and fifty cents a hundred. A dollar and a quarter a hundred—Danny! Shh.

P: Dollar and a quarter a hundred, now, that's a hundred pounds?

M: Hundred pounds.

P: Now, did you all go in a group, in a truck or something, or did you just go off and—

M: We, most of them—man, he'd come around if he had a guy with a—I don't know, I guess he was contracted or something or other—to get hands to haul or pick his cotton, and there would be, I guess, ten or fifteen of us on a truck.

P: Were these crews ever mixed in the sense that there'd be black, white, Indian, all kind of people working together, or were they pretty much just Indians together?

M: Well, mostly, what we worked with was mostly Indians. Well, the whole crew that I worked in, that he picked up, would be Indian. Now, when we get to the field, now, there would be some colored people working there and some white people working, too. But, you never did know how much they did; the man that contracted it would be strictly Indians that picked up all, would be nothing but Indians that went with him.

P: How old were you for the first time you started doing that kind of work?

M: Hmm. I guess, ten, twelve years old.

P: So, that would have been before you started coming to school in Atmore?

M: Yeah, quite a few years.

P: What church did you grow up in?

M: Well, I never have really belonged to a church. But . . . my mother belonged to a Holiness Church and I was raised in a Holiness Church. I mean, the Holiness Church was the only one that I ever was affiliated with. And I still go to Holiness Church when I do go to church. I don't plan **pain** to have one religion; I go to a Baptist church, a Methodist church, any church I take up notion to go, but I—

P: When you were a child—what I'm getting around to—was the church an important part of your social life, too, or—

M: Yeah, yeah, church was a big deal. We could get out and had a lot of young folks, I guess we call it young folk's service. I meant they give the young folks something to do, besides working on it, they give them Christmas plays. There's about ten or twelve churches that gets their minds together from here to **Marlena**, Brewton, used to have a young folk's service. Want to put on the best show, you know, they have a prize. It really was something to strive for, you really put out for—plays, singing.

P: But these were churches from all around here, not just Indian churches?

M: All around. No, they wasn't all Indian churches. Like I said, it was the Holiness Church, they wasn't strictly Indian churches, but churches out to Hog Fork, Poarch, most of the people that had attending them was Indian people.

P: One thing I've wondered about is, back even, say, twenty years or so ago, in the church, on things like that, it sounds like there was no hard feelings about Indians or white or anybody, everybody just went to church together. Is that true, or were there occasionally problems along those lines?

M: To the best of my knowledge, I don't think we ever did have any problems at churches with white people or Indians.

P: Was there anything besides the school, was there ever any that you can remember, that there were ever any problems along those lines?

M: No, I can't, not to my knowledge. I know you can go to town and we was treated just as good. Only thing I can remember was, in school, there was some conflict

to a certain extent, in school, and I think that was about the only thing that I really can remember that . . . showed a difference between the races of people.

P: Yeah. What about the courts or the law or anything like that, was there ever any problem along those lines?

M: I don't know, I never did have to go to court. [laughter]

P: One thing I hadn't ever asked anybody, did y'all have, when you were going to school out there, was there a truant officer that would go around and get kids if they didn't come to school right through here, or was that left pretty much up to the individual parents or what?

M: I'll give you the best answer I know. I have heard of it, but I never did see one of them.

P: But the kids said there was one walking around?

M: Yeah.

P: Well, getting back to school, could you talk about how you first got into athletics, that whole thing, in high school?

M: Yeah.

P: Okay, go ahead.

M: Well, I first went to Atmore High School, or Escambia County High School. There was Houston McGhee—which was [inaudible]. He had two brothers ahead of me and him, Curtis McGhee and Frank McGhee. They was the ones that really had the roughest time going to high school. They were the ones my dad and my uncle and them, they put on, had to ride the bus a lot of times for them. But, after they got accepted in high school, they got in a little sports activity playing football,

baseball, stuff like that. Then I wasn't too far behind of them, and I guess they was the ones really opened up the doors to go to school. Best I remember, was Curtis and Frank and a girl named Dolly Carper. Who was the other one . . . there was a couple colored girls and boys, can't recall their first names right now. But one of them is a registered nurse now in Houston. Well, and they was the ones that had the roughest time going to school. And I got in after they went in, and they never did finish school, Curtis and them, but they'd opened the doors for us to come in to go ahead. I had an old teacher when I was in this Indian school up here, **Miss Grace Kay**. I never will forget her, she was a terrific teacher. She was terrific. I finished ground school under her, went into seventh grade to Atmore, had a coach down there by the name of **Goldsome** at that time. And I didn't go out for any sports in the seventh and eighth grades sort of thing. Then I finally went out for sports in the ninth grade. And she was one of the biggest things; she kept asking old Coach Goldsome how I was doing. Matter of fact, he was my math teacher at that time, too. And she kept on asking him if I was playing any kind of sport, and he was the head football coach. So, he kept asking me, he come ask me one time, ask about going out for football. At that time, Houston had went out for football. And it was hard, when you went out for football, 'cause if you didn't have a way home on those days—and we live, I guess, ten miles out of town, eighteen miles out of town. When you practiced football till after dark, it's hard to get a way home unless you hitchhike, and I walked it quite a few times.

P: You walked all the way out there?

Unidentified man: Anyhow.

M: Yes, sir. Well, anyhow, to make a long story short, Houston first went into sports. Then I followed him, I guess, just to give him a companion to walk home, I guess. [laughter] Because I never did think I would [inaudible]. But we did, we went out for football, we made the team. We got a couple of years, a year or two. We'd hitchhike home after practice. Sometimes the parents would be down to pick us up. When they couldn't make it, we'd have to hitchhike home, and then, later on, I don't remember when the club or what it was in Atmore, where they formed a some kind of club there for the boys that played football who didn't have a way home. You call them and they would come and pick you up and they would take you home. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. Most of the time you called and there was nobody home. [laughter] You still had to hitchhike home. Which we did, we did that, but we got quite a few rides home sometimes. Went on and they changed coaches. I played football with in ninth, and tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades. Houston was one of the best quarterbacks I guess they ever had, till he got hurt. And He and I started to quit school. I don't know, we just got fed up with school, still living on the farm. During spring training there, we'd have to get up at three o'clock in the morning, come practice football, go back to have to work on that farm, go back in the evening. You know, it gets old, you know. But, then I had a coach that named **Holmes, A.R. Holmes**. Houston and I quit school in those weeks. Brought our books home, all of our books home, first time we ever brought that many books home. [laughter] And he was out there waiting on us when we got to the house. When we got home, he was there waiting on us.

Heard you all boys quit school? Yeah, we quit, we got tired of it. I think I was in about ninth grade at the time, Houston was in tenth. Yeah, he was another big man that told me to finish school. He'd sit there and talked with us, finally got us to go on into school and playing sports and that. And one of the reasons I went back, I loved football. I really did. That's one reasons I went back to school, was just to play football, and I'm glad I did and I got a fair education out of it. I wouldn't say I got a good education, 'cause I took the easiest thing in high school I could get by with, which I regret today. But, I got a diploma itself, and in high school, that means a lot.

P: When you were in sports, in football and in high school, was there ever, even in a joking way any mention made to the fact that you all were Indian or, you know, bragging about Indian ball players or anything like that?

M: Well, not exactly. I think they enjoyed us playing football, because—not bragging or nothing—I was one of the biggest jokers on the football team you ever seen. I always kept something coming. I always joke and make jokes at things. I don't know what you call it, but the spirit of it, you know. I mean, you know football and practice every day, but if ain't got something going for you, now, I mean something to keep the other eleven people, ten guys working with you, well, you ain't got nothing. You just go out there and practice and practice. I guess it keep me alive. I was always kind of running my mouth about something or other, I mean carrying on. And old Holmes, he used to get on me. He accused me a lot of going out and crossing the line and getting drunk and running and come back. But he never could prove it, 'cause he never did catch me. [laughter] Me and

Houston, we went over to Crestview; we used to play Crestview, so. Crestview played on Thursday night, and Houston and myself and Frank and Coach, we was going over there to watch them play that Thursday night, 'cause I think we played them in about two weeks from then. We would stop at a little beer joint over there, going on the way over there, of course, Frank was going to buy some beer and old Holmes, he was going to scout them same time and he had to stop at the same beer joint. [laughter] But he didn't catch us drinking or nothing, so he would always accuse us, but he never really kick us off the team, 'cause he knowed we, in a way, we was the life of the damn team, we carried it—not saying carried the team, but we put a lot of spirit into the team.

P: Realistically, do you think that your excellence and your success in football helped the cause of the Indians at all, or was that just incidental?

M: Well, it might. Personally, I think it . . . I'm gonna say that may not go. I think it gave a little recognition to the school, which we have—I've had several great ball players that finished that I did thank that gave them a little more to the school board and things to recognition for them accept the Indians in a more fashionable way. What I mean about that is, giving them more better chance and providing ways for them to get home and stuff like that after, after they have been out there in football. I think it's helped them quite a bit in it.

P: Given the fact that, prior to your time, the people out there just didn't have any opportunity to get any education, was there ever any strain between the older generation and the younger ones that were coming up and getting an education, that they were getting too smart for their britches or anything like that?

M: No, I don't think there was. I think the older generation really appreciated it. I know my daddy, he never did have any education to amount to anything, my mother never did. But I think they really, really enjoyed—I think it really gave them a thrill to see the younger people—

P: When you were playing sports, did you get a big turnout from the Indian communities at the ball games or . . . ?

M: Yeah, we did. And I won't say just from your own relatives, I mean not that, really, what I mean is directly, close kin people is what I'm talking about. It wasn't that many from them, but there was a lot of Indian people, some of the younger people that was fixing to go into high school and was coming up. We really did, we got a good turnout, really good turnout.

P: When you were in grade school, did they have any sports there that you learned to play football and stuff there?

M: We played a little football in grade school, we played a little softball in grade school. But it was nothing, it don't compare to after you went to junior school or high school. Because this wasn't supervised, it was just you go out there. We had learned a little bit about football, reading books and things and people telling, but it was just a bunch of kids out there playing throwing the ball, kicking the ball and that's about it—

P: Y'all never had a coach or anything, you're talking about a P.E. teacher or anything like that?

M: No, no, no.

P: Another thing I'd like to ask you to reminisce about is, tell me about when you used to go to Washington and do research and all that.

M: I have before. [laughter]

P: How did you get started in that and what was your job when you went up there?

M: Well, I take it back quite a bit. I was in high school at the time, and that's when I mentioned earlier about when Chief Calvin McGhee got this grant against the government, there was gonna be a lot of money and get some money. That's when everybody became an Indian.

P: Yeah.

M: I don't exactly remember the first year we went up there. But I lived with Chief Calvin McGhee at that time; I lived with him for, I guess, eighteen years. My biggest part of that outfit was to drive, I drove quite a bit up there. So, I did a whole lot of driving.

P: How many trips did you, yourself, go up there?

M: Huh. I don't even remember how many I have been up there.

P: But it was a lot of them?

M: It was quite a few of them. It was quite—I would say [inaudible] fifteen times.

P: And the purpose of these trips was what now?

M: To work on—well, everybody says to work on Indian money, let's put it that way. Well, it was to get records to show that they were Indian and that they was entitled to this grant that Uncle Calvin had brought against the government. Because, I might be overstepping or understepping, however you want to say it. Really, nobody didn't—I don't know whether they knew they was really, they had

always been taught that they was an Indian. But nobody really could tell you where their ancestors came from or who really was the old elder or how they really became about an Indian. And this is the biggest job we was doing, was going to Washington at the archives up there, on Pennsylvania Avenue, to try to trace back these records and see exactly how they tied back in and becoming an Indian. And who the legals was and who their forefathers and great-grandfathers and so forths was.

P: But everybody knew they were Indian before they started all that, or they had been told they were Indian.

M: They had been told, they had been told they had been Indians all their life.

P: I wonder how else people would have tried to explain the fact that, well, some of the older people are really dark, you know, but they have straight black hair and all of that.

M: Straight black hair, true enough.

P: And I wonder how they explained that other than, they had to just say because they were Indian, that was the only explanation there could be or—

M: Well, can I ask you a question?

P: Yeah.

M: I'm an Indian, now. You see how dark I am and I got a redheaded son, now, how do you explain that?

P: 'Cause you got some Caucasian ancestry somewhere back there. [laughter]

M: That's what I'm talking about. People, they had been taught that all their life, because they was in that mixture. But I've seen white people that claim to be

white people who darker than I am. You gotta trace it back, you gotta go back and run your family tree back there a bit.

P: Amongst the Indians, I've noticed, of course, that among the Indian people today, there are people who are just as white as can be and blue-eyed and blonde-haired but there are other people like, say, Uncle Isaac who are really dark, a really dark person, obviously. Has there ever been any, that you can recall, any joking or teasing among the Indians themselves about those that are light and those that are dark?

M: Amongst us, amongst a lot of Indian people, I mean younger people, I've heard a little bit of joking about some of them was really dark black, they call them black and the other one. But they are, as a whole, not much. Not much.

P: What's the feeling nowadays—not so much relatives out there—but people who are just in connection with this claim against the government who didn't look Indian at all who showed up claiming to be Indian, what was the feeling about that?

M: We had to sign them.

P: You did?

M: We had to sign them. 'Cause it was open, I mean it was a public opening, I mean a signing and you had to sign if he was—what color he was. I mean, you had to sign him up. I think you didn't have to do the work **if he was free**. I think, at that time, the registering fee was a dollar, to register his whole family, whether he had one or whether he had ten or—

P: And then the responsibility was on him to prove that he really was an Indian?

- M: It was on them that signed up unless they might want contract with a adjunct councilman, and he never did charge people too much to try to prove that they was Indian or whether they was not.
- P: Do you ever recall that there was any colored people there that showed up trying to sign up for Indian money?
- M: Not at the time that I was living with Uncle Calvin, I don't think—I can't remember if there was or not. I don't believe there were. But I have heard in the last three or four years, about the last two years, there since—well, I went to Illinois, and I had heard that there was several of colored people that had come out and tried to sign up for it. And I just hate hearsay. I don't say it for a fact, but I heard of it.
- P: I wonder if that was true, whether some of them got a check or not. [laughter]
- M: I . . . don't think that, I think Uncle Calvin had it. He was a great man. He was a man had a knowledge. I mean, he wasn't very educated in books, in school, **say**, in finishing grades one, two, three, but he had a great knowledge about human beings. He could tell whether a man, he says, I came from so and so, 'cause he had done quite a bit of research work, he said. He knew people, he knew people.
- P: Talk about him a little bit and what you think he was up to and all that, what he was trying to do.
- M: Like I said, he was a father to me because—actually, I lived with him more than I did my own father. He wasn't trying to get personal recognition for his self, he was trying to get recognition for the Indian people as a whole, as they own individual, or, I meant, as a race of people.

P: Why was he trying to do that, do you think?

M: Well . . . I don't know. Like I say, though, you know the community—you got a Negro community, and a white community and a Indian community. And he had been taught all his life he was an Indian, ever since he'd been knee high to a duck, I guess. And he had seen the discriminations, I guess, the way the Indian people had been kind of pushed back, during his time coming up in his childhood, too; how they got along with people. Like I said, he didn't have much in schooling, but he read. He could read. He read a lot about the Indian people, 'cause he was one, he had been taught that he was all his life. I guess, after he got up here, he had a nice farm. It had been kind of handed down, to a certain extent, I guess. I guess there was thirteen of them, I believe it was, brothers and sisters. He was a leader among his brothers and sisters, and he knew, more, how to go about doing things and that's the reason people accepted him as a chief, because he could talk to people. He didn't have to raise his voice. I mean, he was a small man, couldn't raise his voice. He'd get mad, sometimes, but he could talk. When this plan got started, like I said, I don't think he did it for personal reasons—which, I know he didn't. Like I said before, he just wanted to get the recognition of the Creek Indians, which had kind of been ignored for the twenty or thirty years, in a way, through this part of the country. He just wanted to get the Creek Nation back as a nation and as a race of people, to stand together and accomplish something.

P: Do you think he ever had any ideas of someday, eventually in the future, seeing complete integration of the Indians with the white people or—

M: Yes.

P: Is that what he was after?

M: Yes, sir. To my opinion, I believe he did.

P: Yet he did things like putting on war bonnets and all of that, which sort of makes him stand apart from other people.

M: Yeah, but you look at it other, it makes people respect you, too.

P: Oh.

M: I say respect you; it gives you a little authority, I guess. Then again, it does make people respect you and that you are going back to your culture and knows that you an Indian. It's like you and I, if you know what I am, me and you can get along pretty good together. But if I'm a big pretender, and I tell you something today and do the opposite tomorrow, you know what I am. But he wasn't a man like that, and when he put his dressing on, and he went and he told you something, he'd do it.

P: So it was wanting to have equal opportunity and all for Indians—

M: Equal opportunity.

P: But at the same time to recognize—

M: As an Indian person, as a Indian of the Creek Nation.

P: Do you think he was trying to get some of the Indian people to know who they were, that they hadn't . . .

M: For recognition, I think he was. Recognition.

P: You're now on the council yourself. What do you see as being the future, particularly now that the money has come from the land claim, what lies in the future for Indians working in South Alabama?

M: Well, it's not but one thing to do, is to move forward. Further ahead.

P: What direction do you think that would be?

M: I think we can . . . like I said, I'm on the council, I'm in a non-profit organization. But if we can get more people in school, I think what we striving to do is keep the people in school, Indian people in school, trying to get them more scholarship, trying to work together to give them a better education, get more in trade school and stuff like that. And just to be an Indian American, just to be an American. And I think if we can accomplish this, we have done quite a bit, just to keep people moving ahead and going along with society and moving ahead. I think that would be one of the biggest—I think that was one of his dreams. Not to live the old program. I like to go back and reminisce at the old times, but you can't live the old times, I mean, you can't live today like the Indians did a hundred years ago. You gotta move as progress moves, and if you don't move, you're gonna get run over. And I think he saw that. I think he knew if he could accomplish, get one thing started—which he was, he was a great politician, in a way. He never did run for office or nothing, but politicians have come and asked him to carry the Indian vote, which he has. You thought the last [inaudible] of people. But I think he saw that, to get the Indian people to move ahead and establish themselves as a Indian, as a race of people, as an American and move as America moves. And I think that's what his dream was, not be a labor or just

some dumb Indian, like he always said, but move and get an education and move as the world moves.

P: You say it like some dumb Indian, is that an expression that you've heard in your life?

M: Yeah, I have heard that.

P: Yeah?

M: Maybe it's in songs and a lot of things, but I have heard the expression dumb Indian.

P: I remember one time, I asked you when you were in the service, you'd ever been called a chief, and you said, yeah, that and a lot worse. [laughter] What are some of the worst things you . . . ? What did you have in mind? [laughter]

M: Yeah, I have been called quite a few names.

P: Because you were Indian or because you were—

M: No, I don't think that, not really. I think lot of them are just in joking ways, I don't think it was being intentionally just because I was an Indian, I don't think it was meant that way.

P: Do you think that there are many Indians who go around like with a chip on their shoulder because they're Indian? Is that a characteristic of Indian people around here or not?

M: Not to my knowledge, it wasn't. Not to my knowledge, it was not. I know I don't, as an Indian myself, I don't. I got my own ways—

[Break in Recording]

M: I don't think having a chip on your shoulder is actually like saying you're mad against the whole world. You're not going to accomplish anything like that there. One person, he can't do anything, he ain't going to accomplish anything, I meant, you might have a grudge against another person.

P: As a person.

M: As a person yourself, I mean [inaudible]. As far as getting a chip on his shoulder, holding against what the white people did to the Indians, I mean it, you really can't let your [inaudible]. I can't. I can't hold it against him. I mean, maybe that was their way of surviving, and maybe that is why we are losing, if you know what I mean. But, you can—I read the Bible quite a bit. I won't say quite a bit, but I heard people speak about it. They say, well, you have so many different denominations of churches. Okay. You have so many different denominations of Indians, races of the Indians, white people, Mexican, Negro. I mean, if you're not gonna—because they say, go to this church and you go, and that's when I'm going to take you up to see the Great White Spirit. I mean, that's the same way, you know what I mean? You just can't go about and fight the whole world because you don't be one way.

P: So you feel like, despite what you read in the paper about Indians in other parts of the country, the Indians around here have not been very prone to have a chip on their shoulder about things that have happened in the past?

M: No, I don't. I don't. I'm speaking strictly for myself. I really don't. I don't know if you're referring to some of the things that the, **heard the Indians** keep doing.

P: Yeah.

M: Well, I don't condemn them either. I mean—

P: Like the ones that occupied the B.I.A. Building.

M: Yeah. Well, I don't condone them for it, condemn them for it. Maybe they had a legitimate reason to do it. I mean—well, they've been out, I don't know exactly what side it was . . . I never been on a reservation. And I don't know what living on a reservation would be.

P: You never visited any in the Wisconsin area or—

M: Yeah, I have visited and talked with them, but I mean not [inaudible] lives. I mean, they could come off the reservation go get drunk and do anything they wanted, but I meant I never been on where they had to stay right there on that reservation and not come off. Maybe these Indians up there did have a legitimate reason to do it. I don't know, but I never talked with any of them. But I don't condone them and I don't go along with them. I think there is a better way of doing anything, and demonstrations—I don't believe in demonstrations myself. I don't see where it accomplishes anything, myself.

P: In your travels around the country and so forth, have you met Indians from other parts of the country at all?

M: Yeah. I don't say from other countries.

P: I mean from other parts of this country.

M: Yeah, I met some Indians in Oklahoma. I was stationed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma for six months. And I went to Wisconsin and I met some Indians on the Menominee Tribe up in **Annville**, Wisconsin.

P: Did you feel like you had anything in common with them because you were both Indian, or not?

M: Well, we was dark. [laughter]

P: That's about it, huh? [laughter]

M: Well, I don't know what you mean, in common. You could . . . well, I went on the reservation in Menominee up in Annville, Wisconsin. I met some of the guys on there, drank quite a few beers with them. Just being with them, it make you feel good just to know you an Indian. For me it is, and you get with another Indian, I don't know, it just like, I guess, two white buddies getting together; you can just have a good time. And I can have a good time—

P: Did they accept you as an Indian?

M: Yeah.

P: It didn't bother them that you had a Southern accent or anything like that?

M: No. Well, they don't speak Yankee neither, too much. [laughter]

P: Turning to another subject for just a minute, it seemed to me, at some time, you or somebody else has made a few statements about the Indians around here as if they are a little bit different in their ways of thinking about things and doing things, and one of the things I've heard some people say is, that seems to be a little jealousy amongst Indians and not wanting each other to get ahead. Is that true, or—

M: Yeah. I'd have to agree wholeheartedly. And I think this come from in the intermarriage with the white people. [laughter] I really do. We have in this Atmore area, Escambia County area, it's three communities. Have Headapadida,

Poarch, and Hog Fork. And we have had, and I say in my thirty-four years, there has been quite a few white missionaries, preachers and things, that's been through these three communities. We have, used to be the Holiness Church was the only church out through, what besides—no, I take that back, besides the Episcopalian and the **Judson** church up there. I don't remember exactly what the number—

P: Baptist?

M: Is that the Baptist?

P: Mm-hm.

M: Up in Headapadida at that time. And I think, out of these three communities—it used to be, when I was a kid, these three communities worked together. I mean, they did. You could have a hog killing one day here in this community and these people come over and help you; have a hog killing somewheres else. Used to have dinners at houses and churches. But now, I think the church—now, I'm not knocking the church or nothing, but I think the churches has played a big role in making, you might say I might sound like a atheist or something, but I think the churches has made a big role for the last five, ten years, five years in the Indian people to this community. I think, because there's so many different preachers that have been coming in and telling one thing and some of them believe here and some of them don't believe in his and you got two or three more different denominations, we didn't have any Mennonites and then now there's a couple of Baptists, and you got three or four different variations of the Holiness Church and the Episcopal Church. I think it has played a big part in knocking the people . . .

persuading the people. And being against each other. But then, you have to go back to common sense, too. I mean, common sense plays a big part in anything. I don't care what you go into it, and then common sense will lead you astray. I mean, if you believe in this thing and strictly this thing, well, you believe in it. I think that's one of the things we had a lot of conflict in just because of it. I know right there in Poarch and Hog Fork there, they sisters and brothers right next to one of them, one of them's a pastor and one of them goes to one church and one goes to another church. But it's still Holiness Church. But you know what I mean, it's because—I don't know if it's maybe the way God wanted it to be, I don't know.

P: Well, with all that going on, I wondered, what do you think—how's it going to be possible, with that going on, to realize the dream of Calvin McGhee that you said, of having the Indians stand together as a race if that's going on?

M: Well, that is a good question . . . I believe he left enough when he died, it might take maybe a year, maybe take five years for it to soak into some of the heads of the older people or the younger people, exactly what he wanted. And I believe, in time, they will realize the dream that he had. I do believe it. Like I said, some of them might die [inaudible], but I think in the next—and with the council that we got, and still pulling together and start telling them to try to carry on, I think in time, they will accept it, maybe. I'm not gonna say as a church, you know in church—can't change this church to that church, but as a person, I think in the next four or five years, that they will start accepting and work together, which I do believe.

P: One time, we were just talking and you said something about the Indian Movement, is this what you had in mind?

M: Yeah, yeah. To be honest, that's what I had in mind. And that's what a few more [inaudible]—we got some of the more church-going people that start coming. And I think they're starting to realize that we are trying. If we can get four or five, maybe, three or four scholarships or something after we get together, and for the kids to be in school, I think they'll start realizing what we're trying to do.

P: Do you think, this past Thanksgiving were there more of the people that before hadn't gone to those things before?

M: Yeah, I do. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Sure do.

P: I understand that some of the people feel like it's wrong to wear feathers and do dances and all those kind of things.

M: Well, most of the Holiness Church do believe it's a sin. I don't know, they believe, that's what they been taught I guess. Like I said, there been a lot of half-ass preachers, good preachers and stuff like that have been through and taught. They don't believe in dancing, they don't believe in a lot of stuff, but—

P: Well, do you think that the Indian costume and dancing, is that really an important thing in the Indian Movement, do you think that's necessary to do at this time?

M: To a certain extent. And what I mean about that there is, it gives us a recognition, it gives the younger people, and some of the old people, that, I guess, maybe has forgotten how the Indians looked, how they dressed back at that time, and then how they had to go back providing a living for they own self

and some of the dances—a lot of dancing, you gotta understand, if you ever know what it is to get to understanding about it. I think it's a way of showing some of the people exactly how the Indians had to survive in the world. And I think it's a omen to show them, if they survive at that time and keep it up, they can have and do have a chance of moving right along. And, like I said, as the world turns, you gotta turn with it and move right along. But that is—the dancing and something other, it's just for festivities, in a way, but it gives a reminiscing of how they used to do it, of how they had to survive and what they had to do and how they dressed and things like this here.

P: But things like Thanksgiving also let people know that Indians are not just in history books—

M: They still alive.

P: They still alive. [laughter]

M: Right.

P: Let me ask you one more thing, Benny. How do you feel about, in recent years, it seems like more and more Indians have married outside of the Indian race. How do you feel about that, you yourself now a married Indian?

M: Well, you have to ask yourself, why do you marry? If you love somebody, you marry them. If it's a white person—

P: You're saying you think it might be just a natural thing that, as you've gotten together more—

M: Yeah. Well, for the last twenty years or thirty years, there's been a lot of intermingling and marriage and stuff, you know what I mean. Ever since, well, since Uncle Calvin **was being intermarried** and though—

P: Even back two hundred years ago there was some intermarriage—

M: And today, the Indian people is moving up. In a way, they just fit right in with the rest of the society people. I mean, they right with them. And it's marriage. It's just like a boy meets girl in high school, white or black. I couldn't knock a Indian boy if he married a colored girl. I mean, love is love. That's what you say you marry somebody for. I don't knock it. I know I might not stand for it, or not approve it, but that's life, and it takes every walk of life of people to make the world turn.

P: Do you think that, if this continues—this is just kind of an academic question, I want to get your opinion. Do you think that there will come a time, maybe not in our lifetime, when there won't be any more separate races of people and we'll all be the same?

M: You know, I've thought of that a million times, and I thought about the denominations in church, if there will ever be a time if there will be just one church. And I think, according to the Bible, there is going to be one church. And I think, according to history, it's going to be—I don't want to say race of people, there can be one class of people, let's put it that way. I won't say race. They gonna be one class of people.

P: One class, in what sense do you mean?

M: I mean it might be colored, white, but they gonna be all one considered one class of people. I don't think that the race or anything will have anything to do with it.

P: Nobody will pay attention to it?

M: Pay attention to it, to my best knowledge I think that's what it's gonna be.

[End of Interview]

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