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Charles Gibson and Indian Territory's Periodical Press

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Charles Gibson and Indian Territory's Periodical Press

Tereza M. Szeghi

I argue that Charles Gibson (Creek writer and journalist) offers an important but woefully understudied voice of resistance to the changes imposed upon the tribes of Indian Territory around the turn of the 20th century (such as forced allotment of tribal lands, dissolution of tribal governments, and Oklahoma statehood). In his regular column, "Rifle Shots," Gibson offered a dynamic space in which to process and comment upon these changes. More specifically, while Gibson was quite outspoken in his critiques of the ways in which U.S. policies threatened Creeks' sovereignty, culture, and well-being, his column also frequently contained reworkings of traditional Creek stories and historical retrospectives. I argue that this combination of politically directed editorial didacticism and assertions of tribal memory through narrative, while potentially appearing as two distinctive versions of Gibson's column, in fact share significant overlapping goals in terms of Creek continuance--while refusing to allow Creek identity to be disproportionately defined by Creek relations with Euroamericans. Ultimately, this presentation aims to make clear that study of Gibson's work offers an important frame of reference for understanding Indigenous peoples' utilization of the periodical press within Indian Territory during this tumultuous period: as a means of advocacy, community building, and cultural continuance--particularly when put in conversation with better known Indigenous journalists from the period and region, such as Alexander Posey.