In a back room outside a bar stand two men estranged by chance from one another, a grandfather and his grandson, tentatively speaking their first words. Otis Payne, the elder of the two, is an imposing African-American man with intense eyes, a wide girth, and a round, soft face. His grandson barely resembles him and is bookish, shy, and uncomfortable. Otis literally owns the space, a bar he has lovingly tended for twenty-five years. But he also owns the space with his presence, which floods the room like warm summer light. He is standing with his grandson in a shabby, makeshift museum, a memorial to the Black Seminoles, a tribe of Native and African Americans who after intermarrying and exchanging their cultures and identities became a single people. Old lithographs, newspaper clippings, and photos cover the wall, each placed on the dingy whitewash with careful precision. The grandson wants to know how his grandfather got interested “in all this,” Otis explains that these are their people, that Paynes are looking back at them from all corners of the room.

“Does that mean we’re Indian?” the grandson wants to know.

“By blood,” Otis says, “but blood is what you make of it.”

Blood has so many layers of meaning and is such a familiar metaphor that this exchange between Otis Payne and his grandson causes me to smile with recognition whenever I think about it. The scene is taken from John Sayles’s 1996 film, Lone Star, about race relations in a Texas
Opening

border town. For me, the vignette between Otis and his grandson embodies an archetypal American relationship, showing how dominant ideas about race and culture shape the identities of multiracial individuals in different ways.¹ I have heard conversations like this one many times before, not only in southeast Texas, where I lived for the first twenty-five years of my life, but also in rural northeastern Oklahoma, the site of my anthropological fieldwork during 1995 and 1996 and in the summer of 1998. These conversations raised many questions in my mind about the roles of race and racism in ethnic identity formation, culminating in this book on Cherokee identity politics.

In this book, I examine how Cherokee identity is socially and politically constructed and how that process is embedded in ideas of blood, color, and race that permeate discourses of social belonging in the United States. Of particular interest to me is the relationship between racial ideologies and identity among individuals of multiracial heritage.² I want to explain how racial ideologies are constructed and then filter from the national level to the local level, where they are simultaneously internalized, reproduced, manipulated, and resisted in different ways in various Cherokee communities. At the heart of these processes are the sociohistorical categories of blood, color, and race, which are conflated with each other and with culture at national and local levels in a variety of sociopolitical discourses and legislation so that “race-thinking” touches all Americans in one way or another.

Racial ideologies are particularly problematic for Native-American communities, of which the Cherokees are one prominent example. For instance, the federal government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) continues to use blood quantum as both a metaphor and measure of “Indian” identity to manage tribal enrollments and determine eligibility for social services. Native Americans who wish to receive benefits such as health care, housing, and food commodities must meet a biological standard, usually set at one-quarter or more Indian blood, and must also present a certificate degree of Indian blood (CDIB) authenticated by their tribe and the BIA.³

In spite of these racial restrictions, the Cherokee Nation has a large and diverse multiracial population. Of its more than 175,000 enrolled members, as many as 87,223 have less than 1/16 degree of Cherokee blood (Cherokee Nation Registration Department, 1996). According to tribal law, Cherokee citizens must be lineal descendants of an enrolled tribal member, but no minimum blood quantum is required. Not quite a century ago, blood degree varied among tribal members from “full-
blood” to 1/256. Today, the range is far greater—from full-blood to 1/2,048. This development raises questions about the symbolic significance of blood and the degree to which blood connections can be stretched and still carry any sense of legitimacy.

Along with blood, color is another arena for the contestation of Native-American identity. When phenotypically “black” or “white” individuals of multiracial heritage claim to be Cherokee, even if they have the necessary documentation of blood descent to enroll officially in the tribe, they are often rejected by some tribally enrolled Cherokees and other federally recognized Native Americans. This complex and emotional situation raises some thorny questions. To what degree can multiracial individuals claim Native-American identity and still be considered socially “authentic”? In other words, what markers of Native-American identity outweigh the dominant tendency to classify according to phenotype? These issues need to be addressed since the legitimacy of racially hybrid Native Americans is questioned more than that of other ethnic groups.

A case in point is that in many universities, applicants for affirmative action programs who identify themselves as Native American are required to provide documents proving their tribal affiliation. This is not the case for other underrepresented groups. This special treatment acknowledges the federal government’s unique relationship with Native-American nations as semisovereign entities. However, it is also a reaction to the diverse and increasingly multiracial Native-American population that falls outside of society’s and social science’s enduring cultural and racial boundaries. According to Russell Thornton, a Cherokee sociologist and demographer, Native Americans are marrying outside their ethnic group at rates higher than any other Americans (Thornton in Bordewich 1996: 46). More than 50 percent are already married to non-Indians, and Congress has estimated that by the year 2080 less than 8 percent of Native Americans will have one-half or more Indian blood (Bordewich 1996: 46). This fact also raises several questions, such as how much “racial blending” can occur before Native Americans cease to be identified as a distinct people, and what danger is posed to Native-American sovereignty and even continuity if the federal government continues to identify Native Americans on a racial instead of a cultural or more explicitly political basis.

To answer these questions, we need to examine the impact of racial ideologies on Native-American identity politics, including how race serves as a basis for the exclusion or inclusion of mixed bloods within
tribal communities. More importantly, competing definitions of ethnic identity and social belonging often result in personal, political, and social conflict as Native Americans wrestle with the perplexing questions—who is really Indian, how do we know, and who gets to decide? These are important concerns for both tribal communities and U.S. society as a whole, where questions of identity are one of the great issues of contestation in an increasingly multicultural and multiracial society.

ORIGINS

In early spring 1994, a group of Native-American women gathered in the living room of a friend’s apartment for their weekly meeting. The women were trying to organize a local powwow, and afterward held a “talking circle,” where they could discuss personal issues and share advice with one another. That evening a newcomer named Viola had joined the group. She had dark hair that flowed down her back, with thick bangs shadowing her black, almond-shaped eyes. She was from Oklahoma, and unlike the others in the room, she talked in an incessant stream of joking commentary.

“Hey, Sammie, you from a northeastern tribe, or what?” Viola blurted out.

“What do you mean, ‘cause I look sorta white?” Sammie giggled softly, shifting awkwardly in her seat.

“No, no,” Viola continued, explaining that it had something to do with Sammie’s eyes and her broad nose, and the way Sammie kind of reminded her of someone she knew from that area. With that spur, the conversation took off and suddenly everyone was talking about the little ways they knew to tell whether or not someone with ambiguous ancestry was really “Indian”—straight hair, flat feet, fingerprint whorls, broad noses, Mongolian spots, Asian eyes, earlobes connected at the base, and shovel shaped incisors. 

“Which teeth are your incisors, your front teeth or your Dracula teeth?” “Does shovel-shaped mean scooped out?” Suddenly, Viola asked if she could feel Sammie’s front teeth. Although Viola had been raised within a tribal community and appeared “Indian” to most people, she seemed insecure about her identity and wanted the other women in the room to feel her teeth too, to see if they were the right type, the “Indian” type. As their fingers darted into one another’s mouths, the room filled with nervous laughter, sighs of relief, sighs of disappointment.
I was one of those women. I came to this group through my work as a graduate student in the departments of anthropology and Native American studies at the University of California, Davis. I entered graduate school to work with Mayan languages and to pursue a Ph.D. in linguistic anthropology. But at the end of my first year, I began taking classes in Native-American studies to find out more about my own Native-American heritage. Through classes, mentors, and a wide social network, I gradually became better educated and understood for the first time my own racialized history, in all its complexity, in the context of this country. Within a year, I had switched from linguistic to cultural anthropology and also had enrolled in a program in Native-American studies, where I could pursue a topic that was closer to home.

Home meant many things. By doing a project on Native-American identity politics in Oklahoma, I would not work on foreign soil. I would live in an area of the United States where I was raised and would share a regional culture with the people I was “studying.” I would also be an object of my own research, because I was of multiracial/Native-American heritage and was subject to the same racial ideologies and discourses of identity. This final point raised many concerns about my ability to examine this topic objectively. I struggled with these concerns for some time but eventually reasoned that, because our sense of self is so complex and multiple in nature, anyone who conducted anthropological research in a sensitive manner would find points of convergence with and divergence from the people with whom they worked. Participant-observation has always mandated a conscientious movement between subjective and objective experience, and it has been the ongoing recognition of these complex differences and similarities that has guided the development of anthropological theory. This is not to deny power differentials or the colonial and Eurocentric baggage of the discipline but to point to the fact that anyone who seeks to represent anyone, including himself or herself, is caught in this tension between self/other, sameness and difference.

Still, as can be expected, to navigate these troubled waters so close to home was disorienting as often as it was rewarding. For example, I had always known that my paternal grandmother was Mississippi Choctaw on her mother’s side and very distantly Cherokee on her father’s side. I was only vaguely aware of this heritage as I grew up, having no exposure to a tribal community and little knowledge of Choctaw culture. Although I thought of my father as German with a Choctaw twist, I mostly identified myself as a Sicilian and Texan because of closer fa-
milial and cultural ties with my mother’s kin. Over several years, my sense of identity began shifting as a result of my experiences at the university and in the field. My Choctaw identity moved front stage next to the Sicilian and Texan, while the German receded. The process was both personal and social. Other Native Americans on the university campus and in Oklahoma assigned me different degrees of Native-American identity depending on the circumstances and the people involved.

At the extremes were moments when individuals argued either that I was a victim of internal colonialism, denying my Native heritage, or that I “hadn’t grown up on a ‘rez’ and hadn’t a clue.” The truth, I think, can be found somewhere in between. I believe that most of the time other Native-American students viewed me as a white woman with some Native-American ancestry. In the last few years, I reached out to my extended family and learned far more about my Choctaw relatives and their life experiences. At the same time, I investigated whether or not I was eligible for tribal enrollment through my grandmother. I was surprised to find that the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma had no minimum blood quantum requirement and only asked for proof that my great-grandmother had moved to Oklahoma and was listed on an earlier tribal roll. However, my grandmother had been born in Mississippi, the original homeland of the Choctaw people, and had never moved west. Moreover, even with proper records, I failed to meet the Mississippi Choctaw Nation’s minimum racial standard of one-half Choctaw blood or more. Had my grandmother moved to Oklahoma, I would have been in, but because she stayed in Mississippi where the racial definitions were stricter, I was out.

This frustrating experience is a common one for Native Americans whose identities are administered and verified through what are often rather haphazard paper trails leading to racially quantified ancestors. For instance, some Native Americans who speak indigenous languages and are phenotypically “Indian” are not federally recognized because they lack proper documentation. Usually, their ancestors resisted formal enrollment because they viewed it as a tool of political, cultural, and social assimilation. Many who witness this pervasive focus on documentation and genealogical descent are shocked at the degree to which culture is ignored in the enrollment process. Although culture is not a primary consideration when federal or tribal governments assign Indian identity, for most Native Americans culture is the litmus test of “Indian-ness.” But culture is also subjective and embedded within the race concept—so much so that cultural identifications can be as arbitrary as
racial ones. One incident in particular, which happened during my time in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, demonstrates this point.

Sitting across from this Cherokee man in his late fifties, she wondered why he kept switching the topic, kept directing the questions back at her. He was a sly and crafty one—a trickster.

He had the bearing of a prominent man who knew that he was well respected in the community. He was confident that if he broke into a Cherokee song, thousands of Cherokee Baptists would flock to hear him sing like so many times before. Cherokee language flowed in his songs and in his jokes, and even though she couldn’t understand him, he loved to tease, loved to watch her squirm, loved to wrestle her own questions away from her. After some time, she realized that the tease was a standard test to see how white she was, how defensive, how much the outsider. If she could laugh it off and throw out a few good ones, she’d pass the test, and if not, well, at least she’d be tolerated. Maybe.

She could tell it bugged him that he couldn’t place her, that he didn’t quite catch her last name. So, she teased him in return, avoiding questions that were brilliantly indirect, replacing them with her own, and through the mutual teasing, their exchange grew warmer and kinder. Their laughter began to ring, filling his office, flowing through the open door and into the corridors of the Cherokee Nation tribal complex. Finally, he relented, having grown more curious in the course of their cat-and-mouse conversation.

“Are you part Indian?” he asked point blank.

“Funny, how people always ask me that around here. Yeah, I’m part Mississippi Choctaw through my father’s mother, but mostly I’m Sicilian and German,” she answered. She thought he must have liked her response, because she could see the man change. His body opened a little. He shifted forward in his seat and touched her lightly on the arm.

“Are you enrolled?” he asked in a soft tone.

“Oh, no. I’m not eligible because my grandma stayed in Mississippi and they say I don’t have enough blood there.”

“You should look into that,” he said pulling his head back sharply.

“I think the Oklahoma Choctaws in Durant sometimes recognize Mississippi Choctaws and it’s important for you to connect up with your people. What did you say your family’s name was?”

“Well, our Choctaw name is Wesley,” she replied.
“Oh, I know lots of Wesleys down there. That’s a real common Choctaw surname. Well, it’s not Tubbee, but I bet you might even have family right here in Oklahoma,” he chuckled. “You know, my first wife was Choctaw. That’s how I know.” He paused a minute and then said, “Now, let’s see. You said you were married. Well what about your husband?”

“Uh. Do you mean is he Indian? Well, no. He’s an Irish boy from New Jersey,” she said.

His brow furrowed and released. He leaned forward, met her gaze directly and said, “Does your husband understand your culture?”

She was dumbfounded. A hundred questions ran through her mind. Was he sincerely worried about her marriage? Did this really matter to him? Or was he just kidding, again?

My questions about racial and cultural belonging originate in life experiences such as this. Through them I have become sensitized to the role that ideologies of race and culture play in ethnic identity formation, particularly among Native Americans of multiracial heritage. These experiences guide my intellectual endeavors and inform the choices I make. But I am no more biased or objective than the next person, and I make no claims to cultural insiderism. Like many Americans, I am reminded daily that racism continues to plague and divide our society at the national and local levels. And although this continuity with a racist past alarms me, it is not the whole story of our country, even if at times it seems to be the most obvious. This research provides a window into one community where, like other communities in this country, complicated systems of racial classification are simultaneously created, internalized, manipulated, and resisted.

CHEROKEE LANDSCAPES

When people who are unfamiliar with the state think of Oklahoma, they conjure up images of “the West,” a dusty, dry, and barren landscape filled with cowboys and Indians where the iron-red topsoil steadily erodes under the heavy breath of the all-too-animated wind. True, parts of western Oklahoma fit this profile, but the state’s cultural and physical geography is much more diverse. In its northeastern corner, Oklahoma is surprisingly green and lush, with rolling hills and dozens of lakes and streams. Here, the Cherokee Nation lies in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, a region characterized by dense forest, poor soil, and dra-
matic displays of weather. During the course of my fieldwork, summer-time highs pushed the thermometer to the century mark, with humidity forcing people without air conditioning to retreat to their open-air porches or down to the nearest swimming hole. Fall brought an early chill, the smell of wood-burning stoves, and leaves in an endless kaleidoscope of color. Winter lows brought ice storms and thin layers of snow that kept me and the school-aged children at home when the roads become nearly impassable because of the inadequacy of local plowing equipment in a state with long roads and relatively few people. In spring the rains were unrelenting, and there was always the possibility of a twister appearing out of the blue on the horizon. I came to appreciate the common expression in Oklahoma, “Hey, if you don’t like the weather, stick around and it’ll change.”

The ecology of eastern Oklahoma has also changed in the past century from what the Cherokees once described as “forests with trees so big and so wide spaced that through them you could see a man on horseback a quarter mile away” (Wahrhaftig 1975: 30). After Oklahoma statehood in 1907, white settlers increasingly took control of the land and over several decades logged the forests and leased the land to hundreds of cattlemen and thousands of tenant farmers. As a result of this high tenancy on a land unsuitable for agriculture, the already poor soil was soon exhausted and the game hunted to depletion (Wahrhaftig 1975: 30). Shortly after, in the 1940s and 1950s, the Army Corps of Engineers, in a flurry of dam building, created what is now known as Green Country, a so-called paradise for sportsmen of bass-filled lakes and game-rich woodlands. Green Country has brought an increase in tourism, but Cherokees are rarely the direct beneficiaries of those dollars. Instead, Cherokees are left with “scrub choked, tick-infested secondary growth woods, fishing lakes with the sites of once-cohesive Indian settlements at the bottom, and a displaced population” (Wahrhaftig 1975: 31).

For many decades, the desperate situation in Ozarkia (a region similar to Appalachia in its poverty and isolation) forced the rural economy of eastern Oklahoma to revert to an Appalachian subsistence model. Many Native-American, black, and white families with limited access to the tourist industry depended heavily on hunting, fishing, and small garden plots for food, on the forests for wood to heat their houses, and as the century progressed, on the state for welfare assistance (Thompson 1993: 17). Fortunately, financial conditions began improving steadily in the region throughout the 1980s. In 1980, the per capita income of largely
Cherokee Adair County was considerably less than half that of the state. But by 1987, “all the northeastern counties in the Cherokee Nation had seen an increase in per capita income relative to the state as a whole,” (Cherokee Nation, Office of Research and Analysis 1993[4]: 2). Still, in 1989, 53 percent of white households in the fourteen-county area had earnings in excess of $25,000 compared with only 37 percent of Native-American households. Cherokees, then, are poorer than their white neighbors, and according to 1989 statistics, 27 percent of Native Americans in northeastern Oklahoma continue to live below the poverty line (Cherokee Nation, Office of Research and Analysis 1993[4]: 2).

While Cherokee people have never known much in the way of material wealth, they have had one thing in abundance—each other. The Cherokee Nation is the largest tribe in the United States, with over 200,000 enrolled citizens, and continues growing in leaps and bounds.
with well over a thousand people applying for tribal membership each month. According to the Cherokee Nation’s Registration Department, in 1996 roughly 39 percent of Cherokee citizens lived outside Oklahoma, but most resided within the state, with over 87,000 remaining in the historical boundaries of the Cherokee Nation. The core of the Cherokee population resides in seventy or so identifiable Cherokee settlements distributed throughout northeastern Oklahoma (Wahrhaftig 1975: 25). Historically, Cherokees have lived in these small and cohesive communities of relatives, and many continue to do so today.

Cherokee communities are the “wealth” of the Cherokee Nation because they represent historical and cultural continuity in the imaginations of many Cherokees who are the first to claim the importance of social bonds. These communities are old social units that have tended to be semi-autonomous in their decision making and political leadership yet fluidly connected to the tribal body as a whole. In 1838, when the Cherokees were forced to move to Oklahoma (known then as Indian Territory), whole towns moved on the Trail of Tears and resettled together under the direction of their own leaders, with scouts selecting new locations that were similar to the ones they had left behind. Some of the Oklahoma settlements bear the names of these old towns, and several Cherokee dialects continue to exist today (Wahrhaftig 1975: 28). These communities are the sites where Cherokee continues to be spoken as a first language by over 10,000 individuals, where survival is based on mutual support and cooperation. Here, the pace of life seems to slow down, refusing to be rushed by anything but the most dire of circumstances. Here, people stop to notice things, to feel themselves walking firmly on the ground.

SOUTHERN VOICES

One hand fans the program guide back and forth in a desperate attempt to create a little wind, while the other rubs an ice cube from her now empty wax-paper cup across the back of her neck. It’s the height of summer, and the infrequent breeze offers little relief. Fidgeting in her chair with impatience, waiting for the second act to begin, she looks around in boredom, noticing the stars peeking through the clouds high above the amphitheater. But her seat is so high and the rows are so steep, that with her head leaning back she begins to feel vertigo, as if at any second she’s going to fall over. So, she rights
herself, fixes her eyes straight ahead on the dense and ratty foliage tumbling from the woods behind the stage, and gulps down an ice cube hoping to quell the nausea in her belly.

After a moment, the lights go up with a single spot brightening around a young female figure primping before a mirror. The anthropologist tries to focus her attention on scene after scene of young people, both white and Indian, both with long black wigs, playing Cherokees. After all, this is the history of the Cherokee Nation—the tourist version—the story of the Trail of Tears told for all the world to see. She keeps trying, but she’s bored, hot, and impatient. Her mind wanders and she thinks how lucky she is that her friend in the cast gave her complimentary tickets, how thankful she is that she didn’t have to pay nine dollars for admission. She thinks of how much flack this version has gotten in Cherokee communities, how people used to protest it and still it hasn’t changed—the same old celebration of Oklahoma statehood, the same old conclusion that the Cherokee Nation had to die for Oklahoma to live.

These thoughts bring on another bout of nausea. And then she realizes scene thirteen is about to begin, the infamous Ceremony of War: the Civil War. This scene stops the fidgeting and draws her attention, as prominent Cherokee Stand Watie swears allegiance to the Confederacy, stating that the Cherokees are southerners at heart, that their interests are the same. Is black slavery the issue here, he demands, because Cherokees are a slaveholding people? It doesn’t seem so when Chief John Ross refuses to breach the loyalty he feels toward the United States. The Cherokees on stage divide, a majority on the side of the South, the rest with the North. She gapes as they start to sing “Dixie” and wave the rebel flag—Cherokees! Then, the fighting begins. Brothers kill each other. Children die. She sits so still. This scene always pulls at some deep place within her, as if her own southern roots were ripped out of the ground and exposed.

The Trail of Tears drama at the Cherokee Heritage Center is not the only place where one hears southern voices in the course of this project. I, too, expected northeastern Oklahoma to have a western feel and was surprised not only at the marked differences between the eastern and western regions of the state, but also at the distinctly southern quality of the Cherokee Nation. Most scholars would argue that northeastern Oklahoma is not a part of the South proper, but there are several facts
of Cherokee history, geography, culture, and identity that cause me to question this assertion.

First, the Cherokees originally lived in the southeastern woodlands of the United States in an area encompassing parts of what is now Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama. There, many Cherokees adopted from their white neighbors a mostly Baptist version of Christianity and a system of black slavery that they slightly modified to suit their own economic needs. When the Cherokees were forced to leave their homeland for Indian Territory, those who were Christian slaveholders took their religion and black slaves with them. In Indian Territory, this same group of slaveholding Cherokees fought on the side of the Confederacy, at times against other non-slaveholding Cherokees who had joined forces with the Union. The Cherokee Nation was torn apart by violence during the Civil War and, after its defeat, was left vulnerable to outside manipulations in the period between reconstruction and statehood.

The historical divide between slaveholding and non-slaveholding Cherokees mirrors cultural divisions that continue to this day, most of which will become apparent in the course of this book. Some Cherokees proudly proclaim that they have always been a southern people, while others disdain this “white man’s” label. Nonetheless, most Cherokees live in a region bordered on the east by Arkansas and on the south by “Little Dixie,” the southeastern portion of Oklahoma that many historians include in their maps of “the South.” Most Cherokees consider Oklahoma their home in the fullest sense of the word, but almost all look back to the South, to their original homeland. Like many displaced peoples, Cherokees long to return to their roots. Some make temporary pilgrimages or save money to buy land, while others ask to be buried there. Many never get a chance to go back, but those geographic, historical, and cultural origins continually visit their imaginations and shape their identities in complex ways.

UNDERSTANDING “RACE”

In the stable but diverse Cherokee communities of northeastern Oklahoma, race is also a part of the landscape, and it intersects with Cherokee identity in important ways. Thus, to understand better the relationship between race-thinking and Cherokee identity, we need to examine critically the concept of race and how it has been treated in the scholarly literature. Race is not a natural, biological, or scientific cate-
gory. Instead, it is a social, historical, and political category defined in biological terms. This biological aspect, which is only one of many other features, has made race the subject of much scientific inquiry, particularly within the social sciences. Anthropology bears partial responsibility for the scientific legitimization of race-thinking, though today most anthropologists recognize that race is a politically charged, highly variable social construct.

Nevertheless, anthropological research historically has tended to dodge the centrality of the issue of race by subsuming it into other social paradigms such as class, ethnicity, or nation (Omi and Winant 1994). The most common of these paradigms conflates race with ethnicity. When race is employed in the anthropological literature, it serves as a variant of ethnicity, connoting biological distinctions and social divisions based on skin color, phenotype, and genotype. When ethnicity is used, it substitutes for race and brings to mind “style-of-life” distinctions based on cultural differences such as religion, language, food, and clothing (Alonso 1994). Besides confusion, the conflation of race with ethnicity results in the neglect of race as an autonomous field. This move is “power-evasive” when we consider that within the context of U.S. history racially defined minorities have almost always been treated in qualitatively different ways from ethnically defined minorities (Frankenberg 1993). Fortunately, in the past ten years, a new wave of anthropological literature focusing on race as its specific point of departure has swept the discipline.

However, both race-thinking and the scientific buttressing of race as a biological category continue to this day with profound effects on social reality. It is in this context that race is both a falsehood and a fact, being false in its biological, scientific sense and factual in its very real effects on lived experience. With this in mind, I have found most useful the literature that views race as a Western social construct used to explain difference and to justify political and social inequality, a construct whose meaning varies over time because it is embedded in shifting relations of power and struggle (Frankenberg 1993, Gilroy 1987, Goldberg 1990, and West 1993b). I particularly appreciate those scholars who use this framework to grapple with the complex notions of race underlying the identity formation process and who then relate that process to ideological domination and resistance (Hall 1986, 1991, Omi and Winant 1994, San Juan 1992, Gregory and Sanjek 1994, and West 1993a).

Another body of literature critical to this project examines the relationship between racial ideologies and nationalism. Cherokees are bi-