

“We Have to Think of the Indian People Themselves:” Oklahoma Indians and the Congresses of October 1934

Neal M. Hampton
University of Central Oklahoma

This paper examines the power of Native voices in the 1930s. In an effort to preserve tribal identity, Native leaders in Oklahoma engaged in a discussion with representatives from Washington. Tribal leaders expressed concern over poverty, hunger, and unemployment during the Great Depression. Representatives of the tribes demonstrated resistance to attack from external interests such as the state news media. Specifically, Indian leaders focused on issues of land, discrimination, education, and community cohesion.

On June 18, 1934, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Indian Reorganization bill into law. This act was the centerpiece of John Collier’s new legislative policies. Collier was the Commissioner of the Office of Indian Affairs.¹ At that point, the tribes contained within the boundaries of the United States turned the tide against the federal assimilation policies of the early part of the twentieth century. Lobbying on the part of economic and juridical state interests led Oklahoma Senator Elmer Thomas to exclude Oklahoma Indians from significant portions of the Act including the indefinite extension of the trust period, additions to Indian lands, tribal government, articles of tribal incorporation, and loans from a revolving credit fund.²

Commissioner Collier, unhappy with the absence of new policy for Oklahoma tribes, sought to engage in a dialogue with Senator Thomas and various tribal representatives throughout the state of Oklahoma. Thomas agreed to meetings at seven

¹The Indian Reorganization Act in its entirety can be found in *An Act to Conserve and Develop Indian Lands and Resources; to Extend to Indians the Right to Form Business and Other Organizations; to Establish a Credit System for Indians; to Grant Certain Rights of Home Rule to Indians; to Provide for Vocational Education for Indians; and for Other Purposes*. 73d Congress, 2d Session, 48 Stat. 984, June 18, 1934. For general discussions of the Indian Reorganization Act, see Elmer R. Rusco, *A Fateful Time: The Background and Legislative History of the Indian Reorganization Act* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000); James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 107-30; Graham D. Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934-45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980). For biographies of John Collier, see Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); Kenneth R. Philp, “John Collier (1933-1945),” in Robert M. Kvasnicka and Herman J. Viola, *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 273-82; Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977); John Collier, *From Every Zenith: A Memoir* (Denver: Sage Books, 1963).

²United States Congress. Senate. “Debate on H.R. 7902,” June 12, 1934, 73d Congress, 2d Session: *Congressional Record*, 11125-6.

different federal Indian agencies in October 1934: Muskogee, Miami, Pawhuska, Pawnee, Shawnee, Concho, and Anadarko. Out of this resurgence in American Indian representation grew the impetus for the passage of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936.³ This act brought the tribes of Oklahoma under all excluded provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act, including extension of the trust period, tribal government, and loans to individual groups of Indians and tribes.

Deprivation

Indigenous leaders of the Oklahoma congresses in 1934 recognized five main areas of deprivation. Native people expressed concern over poverty, hunger, unemployment, the home-less, and continuing racial discrimination. Joseph Hayes, a Chickasaw, found that many from his tribe were homeless and that overall his nation had lost most ownership of land “until the few that are living are in a community that could be regarded as a small reservation.”⁴ John Smith of the United Keetowah Band found that many traditional Cherokee were destitute, homeless, and could not find work.⁵ Peoria leader Willis McNaughton declared that the people of his tribe were living in poverty and “discriminated against everywhere” they went.⁶ Thomas Armstrong in an impassioned plea for the Seneca gave vent to his tribe’s frustrations over hunger, dire poverty, and substandard housing conditions. He said, “I am a member of one of the poorest tribes you have been talking about here in the southeastern part of your county. We are back here in the mountains, rocks, and hills, but we manage to live, but sometimes it is pretty poor. Now since this depression we still get by, but I can’t hardly explain how. Sometimes our eats are mighty small. If there is anybody who needs aid we sure do.”⁷ William Durant, a Choctaw, set apart the materialism of the 1920s as suspect. He retorted that “the material thing that [non-Indians] thought was so sure, wealth, that they through all their efforts to obtain it, has failed them and always will fail them.”⁸

³ To read the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act in its entirety consult *An Act to Promote the General Welfare of the Indians of the State of Oklahoma, and for Other Purposes*. 74th Congress, 2d Session, 49 Stat.1967, June 26, 1936. For general discussions of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, see Jon S. Blackman, *Oklahoma’s Indian New Deal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013); Carter Blue Clark, “The New Deal for Indians,” in Arrell M. Gibson, *Between Two Worlds: Survival of Twentieth Century Indians* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1986), 72-84; Kenneth R. Philp, “Indian Reform in Crisis: John Collier and the Thomas-Rogers Act,” in Kenneth E. Hendrickson, *Hard Times in Oklahoma: The Depression Years* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1983), 168-85; Peter M. Wright, “John Collier and the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 50 (1972), 347-71; B. T. Quinton, “Oklahoma Tribes, The Great Depression,” in George R. Adams and Roger L. Nichols, *The American Indian Past and Present* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Xerox College Publishing, 1971), 179-98.

⁴*Muskogee*: “Minutes to Meeting held at Muskogee, Oklahoma, October 15, 1934,” Folder 77, Box 9, Subject Series, Collection of the Hon. Elmer Thomas, Carl Albert Congressional Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 45

⁵*Muskogee*, 49.

⁶*Miami*: “Minutes to Meeting held at Miami, Oklahoma, October 16, 1934,” Folder 76, Box 9, Subject Series, Collection of the Hon. Elmer Thomas, Carl Albert Congressional Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 42.

⁷*Miami*, 42-3.

⁸*Muskogee*, 42.

Other Indian leaders focused on the negative attention toward Natives in the press and accused non-Indians of corruption that kept the indigenous peoples of Oklahoma submissive and subject to social control. John Joseph Mathews, an Osage intellectual, found that the press, Senator Thomas, and the grafters of Oklahoma were allied in rejecting the proposed legislation. In fact, he asserted that the state newspapers falsely promoted rumors that the new legislation would force Native peoples onto reservations and would result in the diminishment of Indian landholdings.⁹ Adele Dennison, Kaw, said that many Indians in her tribe were not only without lands but homeless.¹⁰ Charlie Good Eagle, a Pawnee, commented that only white grafters said that the proposed legislation was not viable.¹¹ Robert Small, an Iowa, found that “the young people have got no land.”¹² W. W. Gilbert of the Citizen Band of Potawatomi declared, “I want to give you this thought, I wonder if the Indians as a whole are in much worse shape than the white people, and if the depression has not had a great deal to do with it.”¹³ The Great Depression and its impact on the tribes were another central focus for Native anger at the United States government.

Traditional Indian leaders reflected upon the same issues as other Natives. Osage Chief Fred Lookout, speaking through a translator, claimed that he wanted to impress on the minds of Collier and his associates that white people had made laws for Indians in the past. He went on to say that the government was the first to break off these agreements.¹⁴ Chief Whiteshirt, Arapaho, declared that many younger members of his tribe had large families with no land or money to support themselves.¹⁵ In perhaps the most powerful statement of the congresses, John Loco, a Fort Sill Apache, asserted that the government had never treated the Apache well and that the tribe as whole was almost forgotten. Going as far back as the original allotment act, Loco found that the Apache were given poor lands without housing. He expressed the wish that he and his people were to be treated like human beings.¹⁶ To clarify the point of Loco and other Native leaders’ concerns over these issues, the problems of deprivation would not disappear even after the formation of tribal governments in the late 1930s.

Indian Education

⁹*Pawhuska*: “Council Proceedings, October 17, 1934,” Council Minutes and Proceedings, 1906-1950, Records Relating to the Osage Tribal Council, Records of the Office of the Superintendent, Osage Indian Agency, Record Group 75, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Archives Branch, Federal Records Center, Fort Worth, Texas, 1-2.

¹⁰*Pawnee*: “Minutes to Meeting held at Pawnee, Oklahoma, October 18, 1934,” Folder 78, Box 9, Subject Series, Collection of the Hon. Elmer Thomas, Carl Albert Congressional Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 32.

¹¹*Pawnee*, 34.

¹²*Shawnee*, 42.

¹³*Shawnee*, 43.

¹⁴*Pawhuska*, 7.

¹⁵*Concho*: “Minutes to Meeting held at Concho, Oklahoma, October 22, 1934,” Folder 79, Box 9, Subject Series, Collection of the Hon. Elmer Thomas, Carl Albert Congressional Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 30.

¹⁶*Anadarko*: “Minutes to Meeting held at Anadarko, Oklahoma, October 23, 1934,” Folder 75, Box 9, Subject Series, Collection of the Hon. Elmer Thomas, Carl Albert Congressional Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 25.

In the field of Indian education, six Native leaders focused on the issue. The main debate was how to educate the children of their tribes without fostering a sense of alienation from their people. The focus broke down into two parts, one on boarding schools, and the other on public schools. One Indian leader expressed disgust with the conditions at Native boarding schools. Others lamented the closure of Indian-focused educational institutions. All the leaders who discussed education found that Native attendance at public schools was ineffectual at best and ultimately harmful to indigenous children.

Native leaders could not agree on the harm or benefit of Indian boarding schools. James Kennedy, Wyandotte representative, had wanted to send his child to Haskell Indian boarding school but was turned down. He was angry with Commissioner Collier who had told Kennedy to send his son to public school. The child could not abide the racial discrimination he encountered and, instead, ran away from his family.¹⁷ Adele Dennison, Kaw, saw the need for Indian children to be in boarding school. She recognized that there was an Indian boarding school nearby. Dennison saw a particular need for Indian orphans to attend the school in Pawnee, Oklahoma.¹⁸ Owen Tah, Chief Whiteshirt, and Albert Attocknie expressed the demand that government Indian schools not be abolished. They claimed that Indian boarding schools nearby such as Riverside and Fort Sill should remain open because Indian children rejected public schools that had white majorities.¹⁹ Frank Jones, the Sac and Fox tribal representative, accused Collier of refusing to support Indian education. Indian children could not attend public school because their parents had no money to buy clothing or books. Jones also vouched that “those boys and girls at Haskell do not get food that is fit for a dog to eat.”²⁰ With the exception of Jones, Native leaders expressed the desire for the children of their tribes to attend schools that were close enough to their respective Indian communities so that families of the children could visit them.

Community Cohesion

Many factors in Oklahoma in the 1930s worked against community cohesion. Factionalism divided many Indians into those who were for or against the proposed legislation. This was partly as a result of placing different tribes with varying histories in close proximity. Further, tribal individuals divided over whether the state of Oklahoma should govern without the imposition of federal Indian law. Many complained of the paternalism of the Indian Office, citing an attitude of condescension towards Native Americans. Overall, disruptive attitudes conspired against the development of healthy community cohesion in Oklahoma Indian country.

In a discourse on factionalism, Joseph Hayes declared that there were two primary categories of Chickasaw: mixed-bloods and full-bloods. Hayes, although declaring

¹⁷*Miami*, 48.

¹⁸*Pawnee*, 32.

¹⁹*Pawnee*, 29; *Concho*, 32; *Anadarko*, 22.

²⁰*Shawnee*: “Minutes to Meeting held at Shawnee, Oklahoma, October 19, 1934,” Folder 73, Box 9, Subject Series, Collection of the Hon. Elmer Thomas, Carl Albert Congressional Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 37-38.

himself a mixed-blood, gave the caveat that he spoke Chickasaw and attempted to assess full-blood opinion on the legislation. He contended, "Now at this time I want to speak officially and unofficially for this fullblood class. I do not mean by that that they have not been fully represented in the past understoodly, but I do say they have been limited in bringing their consensus of opinion to all our lawmaking." He found that most Chickasaw who identified as full-blood were not as responsive to the proposed legislation as mixed-bloods.²¹ There are problems inherent in identifying with stereotypes originally imposed on Native peoples through racial bias in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is more important, however, was the fact that Hayes knew his tribal language. This capability gave him entrance into an indigenous world that was significantly more grounded in traditional cultural beliefs.

Taking the opposing view, Charles W. Ward of the Muscogee Creek Nation alleged that the new federal laws, if enacted, would deprive thousands of Indians of their rights who were less than half-blood.²² There was some truth to this assertion as the original language of the bill included certain benefits for those who were half Indian or more to the exclusion of those who were less than half. Louis McDonald, a Ponca, thought the federal government wanted to drop its obligations to Native people. He said that "the Indian problem, as often stated by the Indian Office, is a very hard problem to solve . . . The Government has taken Indians over to try to educate them so that they can get on their feet to support themselves, but it seems under the policy of the Government, there is failure, at least in the Indian Office."²³

To compound the confusion, many Indian leaders proposed that their tribes remain under the laws of the state without imposition by the federal government. Charles Grounds, speaking for the Seminole, declared that his tribe did not wish to give up any of their rights as citizens of Oklahoma.²⁴ Vern Thompson, the non-Indian attorney for the Quapaw, demanded that the new bill should not change the laws of descent and inheritance from those of the state.²⁵ Caddo leader Robert Dunlap declared emphatically that the Indian Reorganization Act "is alright for other Indians who have reservations. We have a government. We are under the federal and state laws. We are used to it and I believe the Oklahoma Indians will be better off than those on reservations."²⁶ Many leaders including Delos Lonewolf, a Kiowa, renounced the limited sovereignty the federal government was beginning to recognize in American Indian nations. Because Native peoples held individual title to land and were citizens of Oklahoma and the United States, Lonewolf felt that attempts to return to tribalism would not be appropriate.²⁷

Through the newspapers as well as state politicians, the majority white society disseminated propaganda against Native Americans and used it as an instrument of social

²¹*Muskogee*, 45.

²²*Muskogee*, 54.

²³*Pawnee*, 46.

²⁴*Muskogee*, 53.

²⁵*Miami*, 36.

²⁶*Anadarko*, 19.

²⁷*Anadarko*, 20.

control.²⁸ This divisive plan resulted in factionalism and split the various tribes throughout Oklahoma. Divisions within the tribes resulted from the problems of scarcity, absorption into mainstream white society, and the forcible placement of vastly differing cultural groups in close proximity to each other. As a result, some indigenous leaders drove a wedge between those who aspired to recognition of their sovereign rights as a people and those who could not envision a life separate from joining whites in their economic and political systems.

Indian Land

Native leaders expressed concern and resistance over the status of their lands. Debates raged over individual allotments, communal landownership, land restrictions, inheritance, and leases. The primary debate was between allotments and communal landownership within the boundaries of proposed reservations or in Indian communities. Maurice Bedoka, the first future tribal chairman of the Caddo, recognized that the entire land problem came about as a result of policies imposed by the General Allotment Act of 1887.²⁹ Joseph Hayes asserted that the Chickasaw already lived in Indian communities divided into the four districts of the former indigenous nation.³⁰ John Smith gave Collier a signed resolution of two hundred ninety-seven Cherokee who wanted assistance in establishing a reservation where lands would be held in common.³¹ John Joseph Mathews saw the need for a tribal council house on communally held land for the Osage.³² Frank Jones said that the Sac and Fox already had a small Indian community of land owned by the tribe in common within what was formerly the larger reservation.³³ Thomas Alford believed that the Absentee Shawnee favored the bill because allotment was the reverse of their interests.³⁴

Many tribal leaders declared that they wanted to keep their allotments and no longer saw use in communal landownership. Some leaders judged that their people had

²⁸ "Washington Sees 'Osage Illusion,' Thomas Declares," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, October 13, 1934; "Collier's Cohorts Turn Faces on Eve of Indian Hearing," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, October 14, 1934; "Senator and Agent Debate Proposed Act: Thomas is Victorious When Collier Admits Law Has Faults," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 16, 1934.

²⁹ *Anadarko*, 26. For a shortened version of the General Allotment Act, see Francis Paul Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 171-4. For analysis of the impact of the act, see William T. Hagan, *Taking Indian Lands: The Cherokee (Jerome) Commission, 1889-1893* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indian, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). For a discussion of allotted land in the twenty-first century, see Kristin T. Ruppel, *Unearthing Indian Land: Living with the Legacies of Allotment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008).

³⁰ *Muskogee*, 45. The Chickasaw along with the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole were allotted separately under the Curtis Act of 1898. For an attenuated version of the Curtis Act, see Francis Paul Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 197-8. For an indictment of the events occurring after passage of the Curtis Act, see Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

³¹ *Muskogee*, 49.

³² *Pawhuska*, 9. The Osage were allotted separately in the Allotment Act of 1906. See Terry P. Wilson, *The Underground Reservation: Osage Oil* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

³³ *Shawnee*, 35.

³⁴ *Shawnee*, 40.

no desire to return to a tribal form of government. Others were opposed to the establishment of Indian reservations. Vern Thompson judged that the Quapaw had no desire to hold lands in common.³⁵ Owen Tah said that he had met a Pueblo Indian who made a statement that the Pueblos had reservations and no money whereas Oklahoma Indians had allotments and performed well economically as a result.³⁶ Charlie Good Eagle was opposed to the establishment of an Indian reservation.³⁷ W. W. Gilbert found that most Potawatomi were not interested in self-government.³⁸ Chief Whiteshirt feared that his individual land title would be taken from him for the general use of the tribe as opposed to his descendants.³⁹ Robert Coffey, Comanche, opposed the consolidation of Indian lands and the establishment of a reservation.⁴⁰ Some Native American leaders in the 1930s colluded in their own oppression by rejecting legislation that would give them a measure of control over their own lives and empower them.

Regardless of the many misunderstandings about communal landownership provisions in the proposed legislation, most Native leaders were adamant about maintaining restrictions on their allotments entailing the avoidance of having to pay state and federal land taxes. Frank Jones expressed concern over the restricted lands of the Sac and Fox. In 1926 an executive order extended the restrictions on their lands. In 1936, the trust period would have to be renewed.⁴¹ The 1936 deadline for the continuation of restricted real property applied to many tribes through-out Oklahoma. Other leaders, such as Thomas Alford, believed that Indian property should be restricted forever and exempt from taxation.⁴² Albert Attocknie mourned the fact that those Comanche who applied for patents were too often deemed competent to pay taxes and subsequently lost all of their lands.⁴³ Ultimately, the Secretary of the Interior determined competency. His decisions were the source of the transition from restricted to unrestricted tracts. Indian people often lost unrestricted lands subject to state and federal taxes through foreclosure.

Struggles over leases of acreage and inheritance of property were no less important in their ramifications. Owen Tah remarked that the Tonkawa were deeply concerned over the federal government's position on inheritance. He maintained, "There are lots of us here that have lands for the benefit of our younger generation who may inherit the lands we have now."⁴⁴ Chief Whiteshirt believed that title should also descend to his heirs.⁴⁵ Horse Chief Eagle, in a discussion of his lease, clarified the impoverished conditions in which the Ponca lived. He received only five dollars a week for leasing his land. He expressed disgust that this amount was all he had to live on.⁴⁶

³⁵*Miami*, 37.

³⁶*Pawnee*, 29.

³⁷*Pawnee*, 33.

³⁸*Shawnee*, 44.

³⁹*Concho*, 29.

⁴⁰*Anadarko*, 24.

⁴¹*Shawnee*, 35.

⁴²*Shawnee*, 41.

⁴³*Anadarko*, 22.

⁴⁴*Pawnee*, 29.

⁴⁵*Concho*, 29.

⁴⁶*Pawnee*, 52.

Clearly, the status of Native peoples' individual allotments played a large role in decisions in October 1934 of whether to adopt the new legislation. Some, such as Joseph Hayes, John Smith, John Joseph Mathews, Frank Jones, and Thomas Alford, advocated for communal landownership in a reservation setting with legal protections for their lands. Others including Owen Tah, Charlie Good Eagle, W. W. Gilbert, Chief Whiteshirt, and Robert Coffey preferred to tough it out on their allotments in the hope that the trust period would continue to be extended to their benefit. Tribal leaders' concerns over land reflected their overall thoughts on the new legislation. Their ideas would have an impact on the development of the new law.

The future of these October 1934 congresses was the passage of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936. The weaknesses of the legislation were manifold. Not all Natives including the Five Tribes adopted constitutions. The law also excluded the Osage from the act entirely.⁴⁷ Neither the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 nor the Oklahoma law promoted grass-roots organizing. The authors of the legislation consulted American Indian leaders, but Native input did not form a large part of the congressional act that passed in 1936. Prior to the congresses of 1934, Collier did not insure that Native people were properly informed of the contents of the proposed legislation. The Office of Indian Affairs was paternalistic in thinking it knew best what the tribes should do. Most of the constitutions adopted by Oklahoma tribes in the late 1930s were essentially the same.⁴⁸ The Office wrote up one constitution on which several tribes simply voted to accept or deny. During the congresses and legislative hearings, Senator Thomas and local Oklahoma newspapers continued to actively promote misinformation on the proposed changes to the federal law. Finally, the act proposed to end allotment and the assimilation policies of the federal government, but did not rectify the issues of poverty, homelessness, racial discrimination, hunger, and unemployment in which many Native people found themselves situated during the Great Depression.

The legislation had some merits. The act ended the further allotment of Indian land. The legislation fostered community development through tribal governmental structures. The federal law took some power away from the white majority of the state. As a result of tribal elections, Indian leadership eventually became more grassroots. The new legislation fostered pride in being Native American. The act laid the foundation for the development of tribal sovereignty into the twenty-first century. Even with all of its limitations, the federal law allowed for a limited version of tribal self-determination. This limited sovereignty, however, is what Native nations have to cope with today. Still, there is hope that with economic development and political stabilization, Native leaders may expand this limiting definition. The debate on modern concepts of Indian self-determination began with these congresses. Indigenous leaders in 1934 initiated a conversation that would continue to this day.

⁴⁷*An Act to Promote the General Welfare of the Indians of the State of Oklahoma, and for Other Purposes.* 74th Congress, 2d Session, 49 Stat.1967, June 26, 1936, Section 8.

⁴⁸ For a list of those tribes that adopted constitutions by 1950, see Jon S. Blackman, *Oklahoma's Indian New Deal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 190-1.

To conclude, indigenous leaders in the 1930s were not silent. The power of these Native voices signified their effort to preserve tribal identity. They commented on a number of issues such as land, discrimination, education, and community cohesion. For each of these issues, Native people expressed their strong opinions. The growth of leadership is a difficult process particularly in the face of vehement opposition. Native American history prior to the 1930s pointed to a continued and virulent drop not only in population but also in the ability of Indian leaders to articulate their needs in speaking to power. In this case, the subject of power was the federal and state governments. For many years, these centers of power had denied indigenous peoples of their rights as human beings. These governments had also allowed for no individual or communal expression on issues that directly affected their tribes. In the 1930s, social change finally gave Native people a chance to speak to the centers of power once again. Indian leaders took this opportunity to give vent to their frustrations with federal and state governments. Tribal leaders also voiced their need to appropriate power for themselves. Their testimony promoted the further development of Indian leadership. In the words of William Durant, tribal representative of the Choctaw, “We have to think of the Indian people themselves and see if we cannot, as Indian citizens, get together and do something for the benefit of the whole.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹*Muskogee*, 42.