

Florida Seminole Housing and the Social Meanings of Sovereignty

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Driving past the strip malls of Hollywood, Florida, visitors know they have entered the Seminole Reservation when they approach blocks of modest houses punctuated by the thatched roofs of backyard chickees (from *chiki*, or home, in Mikasuki). On Seminoles' rural Big Cypress Reservation, chickees dot the landscape as storage sheds, front yard spots to sit and socialize, and shelters for taking lunch breaks away from the punishing Florida sunshine. Chickees also convey "Seminoleness" in some tribal casinos' interior design, as vendors' booths at Seminole festivals (figure 1), and even on the Seminole tribal flag, with its chickee logo (figure 2). More than any other element of the built environment, chickees mark space as distinctly Seminole.

If today chickees have come to signify Seminole nation and culture to Seminoles and outsiders alike, however, the history of Seminole housing reveals a complicated and fraught relationship among chickees, governance, and the politics of culture. In this paper, which is part of a larger study of Seminole tribal sovereignty and economy in the casino era (Cattelino n.d. [forthcoming]), I examine housing as a case study of mid- to late twentieth-century relations between Seminoles and the federal government. I show how the 1990s transition from federal to tribal control over housing and other social programs,

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FIGURE 1 Vendors at a tribal museum festival. Author's photo.

enabled by tribal gaming revenues, shifted modes of governance previously established through Seminoles' mid-century reliance on federal government funding and administration. Tracing Seminole housing offers insight into the ongoing processes of settler coloniality in the United States, much as scholars have examined housing as a domain of colonialism in other periods and locales (Celik 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Mitchell 1991; Wright 1991), including among First Nations in Canada (Harris 2002; Perry 2003). Yet Seminole housing not only tells a story about colonialism, but also illuminates the possibilities, limits, and unexpected entailments of tribal sovereignty.

Tribal sovereignty is most often understood to mean the political authority of American Indian tribes over their citizens and territory, and it is based both on indigenous claims to precolonial governmental status and on colonial and United States recognition of this status in law and practice (Barker 2005; Deloria 1979; Deloria and Lytle 1984; Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001). Although most often claimed and challenged by lawyers, bureaucrats, and political activists, tribal sovereignty is not only a formal legal status: instead, I also understand it ethnographically to be Seminoles' shared assertions, everyday processes, intellectual projects, and lived experiences of political distinctiveness (see also Warrior 1994: 87; Womack 1999: 51).

I aim for this paper to demonstrate the historical relations and everyday practices through which tribal administration and economy take form and meaning, and by which they are most directly linked to tribal sovereignty.



FIGURE 2 Seminole flag (digital). Courtesy of The Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Put another way, I am implicitly concerned to maintain a productive tension between Foucault's seemingly distinct modes of sovereignty and governmentality, where sovereignty connotes a pre-modern juridical order based on right, law, and territory, and governmentality focuses on the modern constitution of subjects through circulatory power tactics and fields.¹ If Foucault limits sovereignty's domain to theories of right, my research shows that overly juridical and unitary understandings of sovereignty blind us to the lived experiences and multiplicities of sovereignty. The case of Seminole housing, moreover, shows family and economy—usually linked to governmentality or relegated to an outside of politics (Agamben 1998)—to be at the center of sovereignty. Taking indigenous sovereignty seriously forces us to conceptualize sovereignty beyond the European nation-state and the model of sovereign autonomy, both of which have dominated social and political theories of sovereignty from Foucault to Agamben, Hobbes to Rousseau.

CHICKEES TO CBS

In order to understand the significance of recent casino-funded Seminole tribal housing programs, it is essential to trace mid-century federal and philanthropic efforts to move Seminoles out of matrilineal extended family residences into standardized single-family houses. As a modernizing project, federal housing for Seminoles instituted new spatial and civic orders, which in turn shaped the motivations for, and consequences of, subsequent gaming-era Seminole efforts to control tribal housing administration.

¹ See Foucault's discussion of sovereignty, power, and methodology in the "Two Lectures" (Foucault 1980), his lecture "Governmentality" (Foucault 1991), and his discussion of sovereignty near the end of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1990[1976]).

Clan Camp Living

Before the nineteenth-century Seminole Wars (1817–1818, 1835–1842, 1855–1858), during which the United States pushed some Seminoles south into the Everglades and forcibly removed the majority to present-day Oklahoma, Seminoles in northern Florida lived in multiple-story wood frame houses.² After being pushed into the southern swamps, Seminoles began to build and reside in chickees, open-sided thatched structures with roofs of palmetto leaves attached to rafters, secured by corner support posts of cypress or palm logs. Chickees were well suited to the heat, humidity, and seasonal floods of the southern Florida swamps, and during the unstable war years they could be built and dismantled quickly.

Early twentieth-century Seminole households, or groupings based on residential propinquity and shared activities (Yanagisako 1979), organized and expressed a variety of social, economic, and political relationships. Households formed the basic economic unit, and the matrilineal clans around which they were organized comprised the central political units. A household, often called a “camp” or “village” in the academic and government literatures (and in present-day Seminole English), consisted of multiple chickees arranged around a central cooking chickee. The central fire, which Seminoles often speak about as the “heart” of the camp and a symbol of life itself, burned continuously (figure 3).³ Betty Mae Jumper’s (Snake clan) published rendering of life in “The Village” during her early 1900s childhood identifies the fire as a key site of adult social life (Jumper 1994). Residents utilized additional chickees for sleeping, storage, and working. Camps were organized according to uxori-local patterns; thus, they included women from a single clan, their children, their husbands (necessarily members of other clans), and unmarried male clan relatives. Clan property, as many Seminole women emphasized to me, generally passed through women in the matriline: women and their clan relatives owned the chickees associated with a camp, even though husbands were responsible for building chickees and for contributing to the household economy (Kersey and Bannan 1995: 197). As Harley Jumper (clan unknown) told anthropologist William Sturtevant in the early 1950s: “If you marry a girl, you have to learn how to make houses, and you have to help her kinfolks in the things they do. That’s the way we teach our young ones” (WCSF, 1951–1952, Box 1). Housing thus represented more than shelter: it also fulfilled social obligations between clans and marriage partners.

² For an account of Seminole ethnogenesis see Sturtevant (1971); for a general treatment of Florida Seminole history and ethnology see Sturtevant and Cattellino (2004).

³ For a description of nineteenth-century Seminole chickee camps see MacCauley’s 1881 account (MacCauley 2000). Spoehr’s description of Cow Creek Seminole camps around and on the Brighton reservation dates from fieldwork conducted in 1939 (Spoehr 1944). Nabokov and Easton’s *Native American Architecture* includes a discussion and illustrations of chickees (1989).



FIGURE 3 John Jumper's camp, 1908. Courtesy, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (N02960). Photo by Mark R. Harrington.

When a marriage broke up, a man returned to his own clan's camp, while a woman retained her chickees; an ex-husband had neither rights over, nor responsibilities to, his former wives and children (Spoehr 1944).

Seminole post-war houses were not permanent, nor did they function as metaphors for family and group stability (in contrast to the ideology of the single-family home discussed below). They were widely dispersed, often miles apart. Many Seminoles left their camps for long periods of time, on hunting and trading trips, to visit relatives, or to live and work in tourist attractions. Older Seminoles remember camp life as mobile and flexible: when garden soil became less productive, nearby game was depleted, or camp conditions became unsanitary, all residents picked up and relocated.

Onto the Reservation: The Transition Begins

Beginning in the 1930s, Seminoles increasingly moved onto reservation lands that had been federally designated for their use. This began the fifty-year period in which the federal government exercised the most control over Seminoles' daily lives and governmental operations. American Indian reservations carry significance far beyond their spatial organization or formal legal status. Thomas Biolsi has analyzed reservations as spatial modes of governmentality, whereby modern individuals (and subjects) were produced (1995). American Indian scholars and artists often represent reservations with ambivalence, acknowledging their intrinsic constraints while recognizing their critical role in producing indigenous identities and power (Alexie 1995; McMaster 1998). Former tribal chairman James Billie (Bird) explained that many

Seminoles did not want to move onto reservations: “You wouldn’t either. That’s a concentration camp, that’s what it in fact is. Limiting your ability to move around like you used to” (13 Apr. 2001).⁴ Because the American government had concentrated Seminole settlement for forced Western removal during and after the Seminole Wars, many Seminoles feared that if they moved onto the new reservations they would be transported to Oklahoma.⁵ Thus, U.S. governmental control over indigenous residence took on historically particular connotations of subjugation and genocide. Seminoles’ ongoing ambivalence toward reservation space is exemplified by the current prohibition on holding the annual Green Corn Dance, an important ritual event, on reservation land. Nonetheless, Seminoles’ motivations for moving onto reservations were many: during this Florida boom time some sought stability after being pushed off their lands by new non-Indian landowners, some moved because the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) offered on-reservation jobs as part of Indian New Deal federal employment programs (Kersey 1989), while others clustered on reservations as they converted to Christianity.⁶

By the 1950s on the Dania (later Hollywood) Reservation, chickee-dominated Seminole settlements had become a “problem” that several local charitable organizations sought to solve by raising money for new Seminole homes. The Friends of the Seminoles, the Florida Federated Women’s Clubs, and other philanthropic organizations took up the cause, placing advertisements in local newspapers and working with business leaders to raise funds (Jumper and West 2001: 144–49). Financing was an obstacle because American Indian reservation lands were and are held in trust by the federal government, and thus are inalienable. As a result, banks and other lending agencies were unwilling to finance reservation development and mortgages. By 1956, however, local charities began to work with the local Indian Agent to build six new wood-frame reservation houses at Dania. This set the stage for the federal government housing projects that soon followed.

A turning point in Seminole housing was the 1957 tribal reorganization under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which fundamentally altered Seminoles’ financial and administrative relationships with the federal government (Kersey 1996). Since the American conquest, Florida Seminoles had occupied

⁴ Fieldwork interview dates are indicated in parentheses.

⁵ Government officials and white philanthropists had made several late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century efforts to convince Seminoles to move onto reservations, with little success (Covington 1993: ch. 9).

⁶ The three main reservations are the rural Big Cypress Reservation, located in the Big Cypress swamp in south central Florida; the rural Brighton Reservation, just off the northwest shore of Lake Okeechobee; and the urban Hollywood Reservation. These reservations date to the 1930s, and they are the home of most Seminoles. In the late twentieth century, Seminoles added small reservations at Immokalee, a farming community with an established Seminole presence, and in the cities of Tampa and Fort Pierce.

an uncertain space between individual citizenship and tribal status, able neither to profit from private land ownership nor to benefit from government programs designated for federally recognized American Indian tribes.⁷ After their 1957 reorganization, however, Seminoles became eligible for myriad federal benefits designed for tribes, including housing programs stemming from the 1949 Housing Act. The timing was fortuitous: John F. Kennedy decried substandard Indian housing during his 1960 campaign, and his and Johnson's administrations implemented new federal Indian housing programs under the auspices of the Public Housing Administration, the Office of Equal Opportunity, and the BIA (Biles 2000). Some programs offered grants for impoverished Indian families seeking housing, others provided federal backing for tribes' revolving credit loan programs, and still others offered affordable housing through mutual self-help initiatives. Many Seminoles still vividly recall logging the 590 hours of labor required for home ownership under the mutual self-help program.

Government administration and citizenship are cultural processes woven into the limitations and possibilities of everyday life. For American Indians, who since the Marshall Supreme Court cases of the 1830s have been legally categorized as "wards of the state," social reproduction therefore takes place partly in relation to settler state policies and administrative activities. Prior to reorganization, most Seminoles had viewed radical independence from the federal government as the only hope for sustaining a healthy lifestyle, and to this day Seminoles speak of being "unconquered" because they "never signed a peace treaty" with the United States. Yet from the 1950s through the 1970s, before tribal gaming realigned the possibilities and structures of governance, the BIA Seminole Agency staff administered almost all tribal programs. The legacy of mid-century BIA dependency is evident today in adult Seminoles' extraordinary familiarity with, and mastery over, the intricacies of federal regulations and entitlements.

Despite the BIA's heavy hand, Seminole housing programs were not a simple case of top-down governmental paternalism. Seminoles worked hard to secure new housing. Several adults explained that as schoolchildren in the 1960s they longed for houses because it was difficult to study in chickees, especially those lacking electricity for light. By the late 1960s, a new generation of tribal political candidates campaigned on platforms that included housing development. Their political positions echoed both the mid-century assimilation and equality ideals of post-New Deal liberalism and, to some extent, the sharp critiques of state-based inequality leveled by 1960s Red Power activists. By 1966, approximately 42 percent of all Seminole families

⁷ As explained in a 1956 pre-reorganization letter from Acting Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs H. Rex Lee to Hon. Paul G. Rogers, a U.S. Congressman from Florida, the BIA could not release funds for Seminole housing because Florida Seminoles had not yet attained full recognition by the United States (RQP, Box 2).



FIGURE 4 A 1960s CBS home, probably on the Big Cypress Reservation. Courtesy, National Anthropological Archives (Ethel Cutler Freeman Papers, Neg. 2002-1430).

had abandoned their chickees for four walls, indoor plumbing, ovens, and other amenities offered by their new government-built CBS (concrete block structure) houses (figure 4); on the Hollywood Reservation the number was 64 percent (Seminole Tribe of Florida 1966b, RQP).⁸ Federal programs brought many Seminoles a step closer to reaching the American Dream of modern home ownership and class mobility. Yet, the new housing developments also revealed tensions between competing American and Seminole values of citizenship and sociality, most evident in the domains of kinship, gender, and domestic space.

REMODELING FAMILY AND GENDER

When I asked middle-aged and elderly tribal members what it was like to move from chickee camps into single-family housing developments, they generally coupled pride in progress with a lament for the breakdown of the extended family and the erosion of the clans. As stated above, clans organized

⁸ Some Seminoles continued to live in chickees: at Big Cypress, many families lived in camps until the 1980s, some by choice but many by economic necessity. Others lived in camps at tourist attractions during the winter tourist season (West 1998). Some eventually joined the Miccosukee Tribe and lived in clan camps along the Tamiami Trail, while other politically unaffiliated Seminoles preferred to live off the reservations in clan camps built on private land owned by sympathetic non-natives.

economic, social, and political life, so housing transition did not simply affect individuals: it had broad implications for the Seminole public. As Elizabeth Povinelli (2002b) and others have argued, indigenous citizenship and entitlement within settler modernity are contested upon the terrain of kinship relations; scholars have made similar claims for the mechanisms by which colonialism enters into, and relies upon, kinship and intimacy as sites of governance (Chatterjee 1993; Kanaaneh 2002; Stoler 2002).

The BIA Seminole Agency created housing policies that privileged nuclear families, for example drawing up housing blueprints based on the assumption of nuclear family habitation and initially extending homesite loans and leases only to nuclear families with male heads of household. In 2001, then-director of the Housing Department Joel Frank (Panther) emphasized the importance of clan living, lamenting, "housing has gone a long way to destroy a lot of it. We have taken the family out of all that support that was there in the village concept and isolated them, so they have had to fend for themselves as an independent unit" (9 Jan. 2001).

Some Seminoles, including former Housing Commissioner Jacob Osceola (Panther), speculated that the BIA and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) intentionally disrupted clan-based residence by distributing housing without regard for clan settlement patterns. Osceola argued that this was part of a larger government project to make Seminoles more "American" (10 Oct. 2000). His theory is consistent with available evidence that the BIA was engaged in multi-pronged efforts to promote the nuclear family as the basis for Seminole social and economic life. These policies resulted neither from benign government misunderstanding nor from direct state repression. Instead, they represent a particular mode of governance exercised by the United States toward Seminoles that is common to "internal colonialism" (Paine 1984; Schein 2000) or, more specifically, "welfare colonialism," in which the political projects of state governance are administered in part via social services that attempt to "modernize" and regulate family structure among internal minorities and indigenous peoples (Paine 1977).

For men, moving into BIA housing developments transferred family authority from the maternal uncle to the father. Previously, a man's responsibility to his wife's children generally was as a breadwinner, not a teacher or disciplinarian; maternal uncles, not fathers, passed clan-specific knowledge, discipline, and (often) property to their sisters' children. By contrast, the BIA Seminole Agency emphasized the importance of biological fatherhood, as in the 1966 *Community Action Program*: "The Seminole Extension Agent has a unique job in her role to assist the Indian families to learn to cope with the problems of modern living. From a culture in which the woman assumed almost complete responsibility for the children, the father must learn his role in the modern family" (Seminole Tribe of Florida 1966a: 5; ECFP). Southern Baptist missionaries promoted fatherhood and

provided a religious model for its expression, and it cannot be coincidental that Seminole Baptists were especially quick to move into the new houses. The BIA also bolstered fatherhood by extending housing loans to male heads of household. In one sense, men *gained* authority over their wives and children through their roles as nuclear family fathers and heads of household, but in another sense men *lost* authority through their diminishing roles as maternal uncles and clan elders.

Seminole women also reconfigured ties of kinship and sociality during housing transition. Elsie Bowers (Snake), a middle-aged woman originally from the Brighton Reservation and general manager of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc. tribal smoke shops, responded to my question about housing with a typically gendered account. Bowers' mother died when she was eight years old, so Bowers' "really traditional" maternal grandmother took care of Bowers and her five siblings. In 1970, as an adult with three children, Bowers moved into her first non-chickee house. She liked the amenities, but she keenly felt the social costs. Living in chickees, she said, "we were always together," eating, sleeping, and hanging out. But, "once we got our individual houses, this whole thing split us up." In chickees, by contrast, women were in control, but that has been lost with new houses (27 June 2001). Bowers contrasted an idealized family and sociality grounded in "tradition" to the individuality of life in reservation housing.

New homes altered women's participation in the wage labor force, but not by enforcing the American post-war ideal of stay-at-home wives that was built into housing design. Instead, single-family households pushed Seminole women further into the workforce, as they struggled to meet new financial demands. For Elsie Bowers, moving into a house generated unforeseen financial burdens: her family had no furniture, they had to make house payments, and they had to buy groceries, since BIA policy prohibited them from raising pigs or chickens in the housing development. As a result, Bowers, like many of her friends, found a wage job. Seminole women long had worked outside the home, often as seasonal agricultural laborers, but new household expenses required more steady work. Ironically, then, it was only by working *outside* the home that most Seminole women could afford to pursue their dreams of middle class domesticity.

Children, too, reworked kinship through their new homes, and an analysis of their generation is especially important because they are presently the tribal leaders who develop housing policies. Housing highlighted the new-found agency of this first generation of school-educated Seminole children, whose English competency and school-based familiarity with "white culture" placed them in positions of unprecedented importance as intermediaries. The *Fort Lauderdale Sunday News* emphasized the role of children in housing transition: "The Seminole urge for homes began when young Indian school pupils started needling their parents for more comfortable

houses equipped with bathrooms” (Flagg 1956). Dotty Mims, Home Service Representative for Florida Power & Light Company, said that after school Seminole schoolchildren “go home and help their mothers with the homemaking. This encouragement from their youngsters is the most important single factor in the fine adjustment the families are making to their new way of life” (Carlton 1960). Nonetheless, many Seminoles of that generation remembered their childhood move from chickees into houses negatively, emphasizing how much they missed living with maternal relatives.

For Seminole men, women, and children, then, family structure was the dominant experiential and cultural-political idiom through which federal housing programs were framed. As Health Director Connie Whidden (Panther) put it, housing “broke down our extended way of living into individual family units. It was good that we got the houses, but it should have been built in a cluster of the extended families that was living in the camp at that time, instead of putting us in homes side-by-side like on the outside” (5 June 2001). Mary Jene Coppedge (Panther) offered a similar criticism to a University of Florida interviewer:

Yes, sure, I enjoy my house. But if they would have asked me how I wanted my house to be built, I think I would have told them that, okay, I have lived in a camp setting all my life. . . . Fine, if you want to build us nice, single-family dwellings. I would much rather have had my grandmother’s house here, mine here, my mother’s here, my uncle’s or my aunt’s here, in the same location in a cluster so that I still had my extended family. And the government knew exactly what they were doing when they brought single dwelling homes into this reservation, because they knew that would eventually break up the extended family and that the language would die from there. Trying to kill the culture, they knew that all along (SPOHP #233: 34).

Coppedge located federal housing programs within a broader United States neocolonial strategy of assimilation, or “trying to kill the culture.”

Not surprisingly, Seminoles forged complex kinship configurations in and through their new houses. For example, despite the designation of 720-square-foot (24 × 30) two-bedroom houses for nuclear families, many residents soon fell into matrilineal patterns. Many took part in practices of clan-based adoption, foster care, and babysitting. Some moved into houses as a matrilineal group: Coppedge recounted that her whole thirteen-member camp moved into a two-bedroom house (SPOHP #233). These and other efforts by Seminoles to create comfortable homes—to make social, practiced *space* out of physical *place*, in the terms of Michel de Certeau (1984)—set the stage for a new generation of policies and practices after the Tribe took control of its own housing administration.

MODERNIZING SPACES: PURSUING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Federal housing programs for Seminoles aimed to reorganize not only kinship and gender but also space, in the pursuit of a distinctly modern spatial and

civic order. In his study of Egyptian colonization, Timothy Mitchell argued that modernist states introduce a “new way in which the very nature of order [is] to be conceived” (Mitchell 1991: 44). To be sure, this was not the first time that Seminoles and other Native peoples in the region had struggled with and against colonial spatial re-orderings, as historian Claudio Saunt demonstrates in a discussion of Creek/Muskogee private property and fencing (1999: 171–74). More locally, Andrew Ross has shown the American Dream of middle-class home ownership to have been a structuring ideal of modern Florida, from the mid-twentieth-century population boom to present-day housing trends, especially New Urbanist planned communities like Disney’s town of Celebration (Ross 1999). Seminole housing projects arose at a moment when government officials and a growing segment of the American public put their faith in scientific housekeeping, standardization in building design and techniques, and domestic technologies as harbingers of progress (Hayden 1981; Wright 1981). On Seminole reservations, these spatial disciplines and dreams were inextricably tied both to the realization of American citizenship, in the sense of substantive participation in the institutions and everyday practices of American civic belonging, and to the spatial projects of settler colonialism.

In a modernizing conflation of space with time, a discourse of progress/modernity vs. primitivism characterized many outsiders’ observations of Seminole housing transition. In countless BIA and Cooperative Extension reports from the late 1950s and 1960s, government officials contrasted “modern” housing developments with Seminoles’ “traditional” clan camps, touting the improved health benefits (e.g., less hookworm, safe drinking water) and overall progress represented by single-family houses. Local newspapers lauded new tribal housing developments, contrasting them with “primitive” chickee living. An article on housing in the *All Florida Magazine* was typical: “And what amazing progress they are making, moving forward 100 years in one giant step, out of primitive living conditions into the wonders of the electronic age” (Carlton 1960). As late as 1982, the *Fort Lauderdale News* reported on tribal housing authority efforts to build CBS houses on the Big Cypress reservation in a similar tone: “In this primitive backwater, the Seminoles, with the help of outsiders, are trying to bring Indian housing into the 20th Century” (Sleight 1982).

These images of “traditional” Seminole clan camps as disordered—as the “primitive” chaos upon which the contrastive “modern” order relies (Torgovnick 1990)—ignored the fact that Seminole clan camps had been highly ordered spaces. In camps, families arranged chickees in accordance with various implicit and explicit rules governing position and movement. Nonetheless, rather than understanding their project as a reordering of space, government officials and philanthropists adhered to a vision of progress that equated modernity with order itself.

Federal officials sought to create order by building planned developments with regularly spaced houses of identical construction. Similarly planned (though often higher quality) developments were sprouting up all over South Florida during this period, reflecting a population boom and nationwide state and private initiatives to construct single-family houses. Standardization was not just an instrument of cost efficiency but also a distinct goal of federal housing programs, which aimed to encourage and assist “the use of new designs, materials, techniques, and methods in residential construction, the use of standardized dimensions and methods of assembly of home-building materials and equipment, and the increase of efficiency in residential construction and maintenance” (Public Housing Act of 1949, 81 P.L. 171, 63 Stat. 413).

Seminoles remembered the spatial aspects of their housing transition with ambivalence. They frequently characterized the new cookie-cutter residences as stifling and uncomfortable, with few windows, poor circulation, and no air conditioning. Residents disliked the density of their new developments: whereas clan camps had been built far apart, in housing developments families from different clans lived side-by-side in close proximity. People felt hemmed in, claustrophobic, and they experienced a lack of privacy. At the same time, many expressed pride in their houses and extolled their newly felt equality with other South Florida communities.

A key institution promoting modern and efficient living at the mid-century was the home economics movement, which sent state and county Home Demonstration Agents to teach women, especially in poor and minority communities, how to order their homes in accordance with principles of science, economy, and taste. Since passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the United States Department of Agriculture had established Cooperative Extension Service programs designed to train citizens in the sciences of agriculture and homemaking. These programs promised Americans, especially women, that from within their homes they could take part in a project of efficiency that would improve themselves, their families, and their nation (Stage and Vincenti 1997). Beginning in the late 1950s, the BIA contracted with the University of Florida Extension Services to provide home economics training and 4-H for Seminoles.

Within the walls of Seminoles' new houses, Home Demonstration Agents worked to order space through housekeeping instruction. Agent Aurilla Birrel remembered demonstrating cleaning techniques to housewives who were about to move into their newly finished houses. She hired and trained young Seminole women as teaching aides in the hope that they would internalize and perpetuate the program's goals (SPOHP SEM #112: 3). In 1956, local philanthropic women's groups promoted proper housekeeping by sponsoring a contest among Seminole housewives to see whose housekeeping skills would improve most quickly. Women from the Broward County

Home Demonstration Council, a volunteer arm of the Florida Extension Service, served as judges. Each judge allotted points in categories such as “Furniture neatly arranged,” “Clean comb for each person,” and “Plant fruit trees” (RQP, Box 2). As Tsianina Lomawaima has discussed in the context of federal boarding schools for American Indians, training in domesticity long had been a highly gendered, embodied, and disciplinary tactic of assimilation (Lomawaima 1994); the difference in this case was that Seminole women were being (re)trained to run their own reservation households.

Home Agents also trained Seminole women in discerning consumption, for example accompanying them to furniture stores and encouraging them to peruse catalogues for home organization inspiration (Boehmer 1957; FCESAR). Technology was an especially potent marker of modernity. When contrasting Seminoles’ modern homes with chickee living, observers often singled out their technological superiority: journalists wrote of “new-fangled gadgets,” shiny appliances, and electricity. The seeming paradox of American Indians deploying technology has been a key trope in twentieth-century images of native peoples, as Philip Deloria has shown (Deloria 2004). Instead of recognizing ways that Seminoles had selectively incorporated technology into their camp lives—electric sewing machines for making patchwork, radios playing country music, and light bulbs under which schoolchildren gathered to study (Garbarino 1972)—press and government documents told a tale of modernization in which native “progress” flows from the benevolence of white bureaucrats and philanthropists.

In this typical image of modernization at work (figure 5), Mary Parker Bowers (Snake) appears to listen attentively while a home agent instructs her on the use of a new oven. After locating this photograph in the records of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service, I delivered a print to Bowers, then eighty years old (figure 6). Delighted, she began to tell me what it was like to move into her first non-chickee house. She laughed, saying: “God, that’s a job we got into! Before we just had a fire! We thought it [housekeeping] was too much work.” She remembered that the home agent, May Ola Fulton, taught her how to operate, clean, and maintain her stove and other appliances, and she proudly recalled that she won first place in a housekeeping contest. Her pleasure and nostalgia upon viewing the staged photograph reflected little of the power dynamic suggested by the image, though her memories of increased household labor expressed ambivalence about moving from chickee to CBS living: “Gosh, it was a job then. [In a chickee] we just had an open house. Air-conditioning ran through it. [In the new house], extra bills came in. Pay the light bill and water bill.” Historical studies of gender and housework support Bowers’ recollection that appliances and other “modern” housing conveniences did not reduce, and may even have increased, women’s household labor (Cowan 1983). She then pointed to an original painting hanging on her wall that depicted a chickee scene. She explained



FIGURE 5 Mary Parker Bowers being instructed on oven use, 1960. Courtesy, University Archives, Department of Special Collections, Florida Cooperative Extension Service Records, Box 58, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida.

that she used this and other paintings as pedagogical devices for her grandchildren: “I have pictures to show ‘em, that’s how we lived.” Sometimes, she added with a tone of resignation, the children don’t seem to believe that she really lived like that (21 Aug. 2002).

Although Bowers and other Seminole women embraced aspects of CBS living, government efforts to enlist them into maintaining a new spatial order through modern housekeeping fell short. Instead, Seminoles engaged in everyday practices that integrated previously established modes of embodiment and domesticity with new living conditions. For example, faced with prohibitions on building chickees in housing developments, many families maintained their old chickees, often located miles away. One young man remembers that his grandmother never grew accustomed to using her pantry; instead, she stored food in a covered garbage can, a practice that, in her camp, had kept the food secure from vermin.

In BIA reports from this period, observers often mentioned that new Seminole houses were dirty and poorly kept. James O. Buswell III, an anthropologist who conducted an ethnographic study of Seminole religion in the late 1960s, observed that in the new houses there was “no conception of the differentiation of indoors [sic.] space-use for which it was designed”:

Even in the best homes the use of space and surface areas seems to the white observer to be completely unplanned. Thus in one fairly modern, air-conditioned C.B.S. house at



FIGURE 6 Mary Bowers in 2002. Author's photo.

the Hollywood reservation the following items were noted in the front room: couch, chairs, table occupied by lamp and books, coffee table, piano, portable record player, electric sewing machine, and carpet. On the various surfaces were the following: Books (two New Testaments, a dictionary, a one-volume Encyclopedia, The Golden Book Encyclopedia, The Life of Christ, "Greater Cleveland" booklet, mathematics text); and the following miscellaneous articles: sewing equipment and supplies, a bottle of glue, doll's baby bottle, loose leaf notebook, records, magazines, cloth of different colors, medicine bottles, flannel-graph materials, glasses case, papers, a bath towel, bottle opener, and about two dozen empty soft-drink bottles (1972).

Buswell's observations, typical of the period, resonate with government practices that took the "unordered" status of one's home, whether among Seminoles or other poor and minority populations, as a sign of social disorder and administrative failure (Wright 1981).

The built environment can be both a locus for ideologies of citizenship and a structuring possibility for the achievement of citizenship (Caldeira 2000). Indeed, Seminoles' dwelling practices have been central to their complex negotiations of American and Seminole citizenship, not only via governmental policies but also in everyday practices of political belonging. By working closely with the BIA, HUD, and other federal agencies to acquire housing, Seminoles pursued a collective relationship to the federal government, but they also developed new individualized relationships to the nation-state as citizens. They lived out the vision of planners who "contended that new models for housing . . . would provide the proper setting for a great [American]

nation” (Wright 1981: xv). So, for example, one local newspaper articulated the desires of Mrs. Henry Billie (clan unknown), who had just moved into her home, in terms of American belonging and civic participation: “She wants to be a ‘good American’ and plans to register to vote as soon as books are opened for registration” (Flagg 1956). Home Agent May Ola Fulton felt that by learning American cooking Seminoles would be more American: “They wanted to learn about American—how to make, how to make a meatloaf, for instance” (Fulton, SPOHP #127: 14).

As the motto for Fannie Mae, the American housing financing corporation, puts it: “Our Business Is The American Dream” (Fannie Mae 2005). Homeownership, the bedrock of the American Dream, is a foundation upon which the full realization of citizenship is culturally and economically organized in the United States. For Seminoles and other American Indians living on reservations, however, homeownership is circumscribed by their individual inability to hold title to federal trust lands and, thus, always has been limited by the specific relationships between tribal nations and the United States. But it is crucial to recognize that BIA programs did not merely *extend* the American Dream to Seminoles. Instead, it was in part through administrative mechanisms aimed at Seminoles and others at the margins that the very ideal of the American Dream took hold in the first place.

MAKING HOUSES INTO HOMES: POST-CASINO TRIBAL CONTROL

Changes in tribal housing after Seminoles took over their housing programs demonstrate the close ties linking Seminole dwelling, economy, and sovereignty. Barsh and Henderson (1980) argued that until tribes could marshal sufficient economic resources they would fall short of the government-to-government relationship envisioned by the doctrines of tribal sovereignty. The authors could have anticipated neither the growth of tribal casinos nor how they would intersect with a growing post-Red Power self-determination movement partially focused on tribal administration. As Biles (2000) explained, since the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, American Indian tribes increasingly contracted housing and other social services from the BIA.⁹ To some extent, federal officials supported increased tribal administrative and fiscal control, often in response to demands from indigenous leaders and in the face of shrinking Reagan-era funding streams. Tribal social service administration became a key site for sovereignty (Fowler 2002). As Joanne Barker argues, self-government has become conceptually tied to indigenous sovereignty, as part of the struggle “to decolonize social institutions from federal/state paternalism and to

⁹ In 1971, Miccosukees, who split from Seminoles in the 1960s, became the first American Indian tribe to contract all government services from the federal government, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Miccosukee Agency was disbanded (Kersey 1996).

reformulate them along the lines of distinctive cultural perspectives. This is evident in everything from efforts to revitalize traditional forms of education and health care to reclamation of legal traditions and practices” (2005: 22).

The ongoing (partial) transfer of administrative control from federal agencies to tribal governments represents neither a straightforward valuation of local control and singular, modular nationhood, nor a simple abdication of federal responsibility. Instead, it redraws relations of sovereignty and governance between tribes and the United States, and it calls into question the welfare colonialist logics that had previously characterized those relations. Examining how Seminoles live in physical spaces and administer tribal governance shows that casino-era control has enabled Seminoles to promote the (re)production of culturally distinctive practices and to link home and family to the everyday practice of tribal sovereignty.

In many ways, Seminoles appear to have embraced the modernization project of mid-century federal programs. Most live in CBS single-family houses filled with standard middle-class household technologies, and most practice housekeeping techniques that adhere to the general principles of home economics. The structure of Seminole governance also reflects the trappings of modern bureaucracy, complete with complex organizational charts, red tape, myriad regulations, and frequent allegations of favoritism. Tribal members quickly learned to navigate the ballooning casino-era tribal bureaucracy, just as they had gotten the most out of federal administration. To be sure, Seminole tribal control over housing and other services does not escape the logics of governmentality, but rather it meaningfully shifts governmentality into a sphere where indigenous action diverges from settler state legacies.

By the late 1970s, BIA dominance over Seminoles’ everyday lives began to erode, as the tribal government began to leverage its (semi-)sovereign status toward economic ends, investing in tax-free cigarette operations and casino gambling (Cattellino 2004). In 1979, the Seminole Tribe of Florida became the first American Indian nation to implement high-stakes gaming, litigating gaming rights through American courts and opening the door for the tribal gaming explosion in Indian Country. Whereas in 1979 the annual tribal budget had been under \$2 million, by 2000 it had risen above \$200 million, with approximately 95 percent of revenues from casino operations.¹⁰

It is crucial to recognize that Seminoles pursued gaming in part as a way to regain control over their own governance—to assert and enact their sovereignty—and to escape from endemic poverty, which had long structured their relations with the federal government and surrounding municipalities. By the early 1990s, the Tribe’s increased economic power drastically reduced the BIA’s role, as the dwindling Seminole Agency, now located in a moss-covered trailer office, increasingly limited its activities to

¹⁰ Figures courtesy of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Legal Department.

rubber-stamping Tribal Council decisions. By contrast, in 2000 the tribal government, housed in a gleaming office building, employed approximately 1,300 staff members to administer a dizzying array of social, economic, and cultural programs.

As a result of casino revenues, the Seminole Tribe of Florida now operates its own housing programs.¹¹ In 2001, the Housing Department employed over fifty people on a full-time basis. Before casinos, tribal housing programs had been funded almost entirely by grants and loans from BIA/HIP (HIP was the BIA's low-income Indian housing program) and HUD. By 2000–2001, the Department was funded at 36 percent by HUD grants and at 64 percent by tribal funds.¹² The history of growing tribal fiscal and administrative control over other social services is similar.¹³

Gaining tribal control over government programs has been a way to express and realize Seminoles' status as a government, in a symbolic and discursive economy of sovereignty. As Stephen Bowers (no clan) emphasized, financial power enables sovereignty: "...we have progressed so much economically, and now we can just say no, too. As an Indian tribe, you know, you can be sovereign, a nation, but if you're taking money from the state, you're essentially not really sovereign" (18 Jan. 2000). Such articulations of collective autonomy as indexed by reduced federal government dependency reflect both a long-standing Seminole valuation of self-reliance and also a distinctly American discourse on the shame of welfare dependency. This focus on economic "self-reliance," as Seminoles often name tribal economic power, is especially powerful because welfare reliance has long been a focus of anti-Indian racism in the United States (Deloria 1988[1970]; Pickering 2000).

Since the gaming boom of the mid-1990s, Seminoles increasingly have administered their social services in ways they consider to be distinctly Seminole, whether by teaching tribally-specific curricula in education programs or incorporating Seminole dwelling norms and practices into housing policy.

¹¹ There had been some Seminole involvement in housing policy prior to casinos. In 1964, the Tribal Council passed an ordinance to create the Tribal Housing Authority, a public corporation charged with building and improving Seminole housing (Seminole Tribe of Florida 1964, RQP). Housing Authority members, though appointed by the Tribal Council, had a direct relationship with federal agencies, and in practice the BIA Seminole Agency staff exercised significant control over housing policies and administration. In 1996 the Tribe replaced the Housing Authority with a tribally controlled Housing Department.

¹² Figures provided by the Seminole Tribe of Florida Housing Department. Some of Seminoles' decreased reliance on federal grants is by necessity: because tribal gaming dividends have increased individual and household incomes, most Seminoles no longer qualify for HIP or Section 8 low-income housing.

¹³ Although here I focus on housing, similar patterns have played out in health and education services. For example, with gaming revenues the Tribe revamped its K-12 Ahfachkee School and developed preschool programs, GED courses, adult language classes, and a summer school. The story is similar in health care: from substandard care the Health Department grew to run three clinics, comprehensively insure all tribal members, provide home health care, operate ambulance services, and run substance abuse programs.

Joel Frank (Panther), housing director in 2000–2001, viewed tribal housing programs as an indication that Seminoles were “moving toward self-government and [a] government-to-government relationship” with the United States (9 Jan. 2001). He considered this to be a shift away from federal paternalism: “The government’s attitude has shifted from the big brother role to ‘You’re a big boy now, you can fend for yourself.’” When I asked him where this change originated, he replied: “Sovereignty. The issue of sovereignty, and the tribes’ beliefs of self-governance and that we’re independent nations. That goes back through the history of time, even before there was the United States. When the settlers first came and when they were making deals with the monarchs in Europe. It’s a time-honored thing going back in the history of man, when nations were formed, and it’s no different here.” For Frank, the nature and truth of indigenous sovereignty had not changed since before colonization, but it only recently had been recognized by the United States.

Housing Department officials aimed to direct their newfound financial power and administrative control toward localized policies. For example, Frank hoped to hire an urban planner to study the relationship between housing and Seminole social structure, and he planned to develop future housing with an eye toward pre-reservation settlement patterns (e.g., building in circular patterns, rather than along parallel streets). He believed that gaming success offered the Tribe an unprecedented opportunity to “insert cultural values which seem to have been lacking in our community development” (9 Jan. 2001).

Indeed, Seminoles have now incorporated diverse dwelling practices into tribal policy. In a departure from past BIA regulations, the Tribe now financially and administratively supports housing construction initiatives that promote “traditional” and hybrid dwelling structures and practices. For example, the tribal Housing Department funds chickee building and maintenance as one component of its home improvement programs, and most tribal members’ home sites, even on the urban Hollywood Reservation, include at least one chickee. Some Seminoles incorporated chickee themes into the first generation of luxury houses on the reservations. Then-president of the Board of Directors, Mitchell Cypress (Otter), added several chickee-like out-buildings to his new home, but in a design innovation he chose to build them with metal roofs (instead of thatch) to match the roof on his house. Then-chairman James Billie (Bird) constructed a thatched entrance to his home, evoking a chickee.

In tribal education programs, chickees have been re-signified from markers of primitivism to expressions of cultural pride. For example, children from the Brighton Reservation have constructed a chickee at the Okeechobee High School (their majority-white public school) as a multiculturalist expression of pride and belonging in the local community. Some Brighton youth spend their summers studying under a chickee at a tribal enrichment program,



FIGURE 7 Chickee employee break room at the tribal truck farm. Photo by Noah Zatz.

where they learn about chickee construction as part of their mathematics curriculum. Tribal programs use chickees for storage, decoration, and even as employee break rooms at tribal businesses (figure 7).

Flexible tribal housing policies have enabled Seminole families to customize their houses, illustrating how changes in formal institutions of governance have produced new lived experiences. For example, the Housing Department builds houses to accommodate diverse family sizes and structures, including matrilineal extended families. The Tribe also funds “traditional” housing construction. William Osceola (Panther), a Tribal Council liaison from the Tamiami Trail area, worked throughout the 1990s to secure Tribal Council funding for his constituents to obtain housing that combined aspects of clan village living with “modern” conveniences. The thatched-roof houses featured insulated, walled chickees that were wired for electricity and air conditioning, arranged in matrilineal camp settlement patterns. Osceola lived in one of these settlements with his wife’s clan (Otter), and his description of the housing explicitly linked matrilineal kinship, gendered property, and tradition: “. . .the camps belong to the women here. Traditional, they belong to the women. Us guys, we don’t own anything, we just live here. We can’t discipline the kids. The women, the uncles, they discipline their own family. That is tradition” (SPOHP SEM #265: 24).

If Seminoles once contended with pressures of assimilation in federal housing policy, tribal housing programs at the turn of the twenty-first

century had to accommodate federal agencies' demands for traditionalism. William Osceola (Panther) complained at a 2001 Tribal Council meeting that he had been struggling to secure additional home sites for off-reservation Seminoles within the Big Cypress National Preserve, where they long had lived. According to Osceola, federal regulations stipulated that American Indians could build homes on traditional lands that were within protected areas only if they constructed them in "traditional" styles. Thus, he tried, with some sense of historical irony, to balance modern conveniences with making sure that the houses were "traditional" enough in the eyes of government officials. Such efforts reflect the burdens of recognition for indigenous peoples who must seek settler state accommodation in the idioms of cultural tradition, even as they pursue sovereignty (Povinelli 2002a).

Beyond housing type, one of the clearest effects of tribal control over housing administration is that individual Seminoles and their families can make new choices about *where* and *with whom* they want to live. Housing policies no longer prohibit construction beyond designated development plots, so many families are returning to a more scattered settlement pattern. This policy shift has been realized in practice only because increased funds from casinos enable the Tribe to provide the infrastructure (roads, electricity, water, sewage) necessary to support scattered home sites. Additionally, some Seminoles are moving back to a matrilocal settlement pattern, and I recorded several home site lease applications from extended matrilineal groups. Some Big Cypress residents choose to live on land historically associated with their clans, and at Brighton I witnessed a debate about the propriety of proposed housing construction on a site that was associated with a different lineage.

Seminoles who commented on these changes universally expressed pleasure that things were returning to the way they "should" be, articulating a desired correspondence between moral, spatial, and political orders. That said, there were some tensions between tribal members' desired dwelling practices and tribal government policy. These played out when individuals were denied housing leases on commercial pasture lands or when applicants were refused housing on more than one reservation because of tribal restrictions designed to alleviate housing shortages. Frustration with restrictive housing policies and slow construction has led some tribal members to move off of reservations, which disenfranchises them from elections for (reservation-based) Tribal Council and Board of Directors representatives.

Beyond the level of policy, and at the level of embodied practice, many Seminoles living in government-built CBS houses marked and experienced their homes as Seminole and "traditional." For example, some engaged in the relatively recent practice of physically representing clan belonging on their houses, displaying signs, sculptures, or other clan iconography. One elderly woman from the Bear clan propped a store-bought teddy bear next to her driveway. Families decorated the interior of their houses with clan

totems, such as images of snakes and birds, while others decorated with Seminole crafts, including patchwork and sweetgrass baskets. As in the case of Mary Bowers (Snake), these decorations served as pedagogical tools and mnemonic devices, they expressed and reinforced identity, and they reconfigured “modern” spatial orders by marking continuity with chickee camp living.

Other distinctively Seminole homemaking practices in the casino era were less visible. Some Seminoles arranged their houses’ exteriors and interiors in accordance with a spatial order grounded in Seminole cosmology. For example, some constructed outbuilding chickees so that the doors lined up in a perpendicular relation to their house’s entrances, creating openings that faced the four directions. Others arranged their bedrooms so that all family members slept with their heads facing to the east, away from the direction of death and the journey to the afterlife.

A pre-BIA practice that has remained socially significant is women’s property ownership. Seminoles cannot hold title to their home sites, but they own the houses and sign long-term home site leases. These deeds and leases are routinely passed down through families, often through women along the matriline. One Seminole man from the Panther clan told me, while relaxing in a chickee outside his house, that he did not really own the house: it had been his mother’s, and it would pass to her female descendents, but until his sisters could overcome drug and alcohol problems he would remain its “caretaker.” The recent growth in intermarriage has complicated gendered property ownership and matrilineal inheritance, since non-Seminoles cannot lease homesites or own or rent tribal housing, but it is safe to say that the trend has turned away from mid-twentieth-century male ownership toward more flexible and, in some cases, self-consciously “traditional,” ownership practices.

Finally, chickees’ significance is also generated by the labor that builds them. Some youth learn to build chickees as a way to connect with their Seminole heritage, and some professional chickee builders value their work as a cultural practice. One young man told me that his elderly clan aunt had reprimanded him for failing to build a chickee for his wife, as a husband should do upon marriage. Today, Seminole entrepreneurs run a brisk business building chickees for Seminoles and non-Seminoles alike, at a substantial price. As I was told by Joe Dan Osceola (Panther), Tribal Ambassador and chickee-building business owner (figure 8), Seminoles can make a good living off the fact that non-Indians want chickees to evoke “subtropical paradise—they find it romantic” (28 Nov. 2000).¹⁴

¹⁴ Osceola considered himself to be among the more expensive builders, saying that he prioritized quality. In 2000 he charged about \$25 per square foot, meaning that a 10 × 10 chickee would cost \$2,500. Now that casino revenues have raised Seminoles’ personal incomes, chickee business owners complain of a labor shortage, since they cannot find enough Seminoles who are willing to perform the hard work for modest wages, and Osceola and others reluctantly have begun to hire non-Indians.



FIGURE 8 Joe Dan Osceola's chickee-building business in Hollywood, 2000. Author's photo.

“DEPEND ON YOURSELF”

Elaine Aguilar (Otter), former Tribal Council liaison from the Immokalee Reservation, stated that casino revenues have allowed Seminoles to return to a model of governance more true to their history and values: “I think we’re finally getting to where, you know, we’re doing what our elders used to do: depend on yourself. You don’t depend on other people to do things for you” (3 Jan. 2001). Since the era of federal housing projects and home economics, Seminoles have refashioned and, in a sense, repatriated the American Dream. Coupling increased control over their self-governance with rapidly growing casino-based funding, Seminoles enact complex forms of home and family that do not generally contrast Indianness with progress but rather enable tribal members to physically and administratively structure Seminole sovereignty against, sometimes with, and possibly beyond settler colonial projects. Indeed, housing and other social services have been key sites for consolidating Seminole notions of sovereignty that are structured around relations of autonomy and independence. Simultaneously, housing has reflected and shaped citizenship across the boundaries of tribe and settler state.

Housing as a case study shows some of the ways—and against which historical conditions—Seminoles envision themselves to be a sovereign people. Yet it would be mistaken to understand this focus on sovereignty to

simply derive from dominant twentieth-century American models of singular nationhood, or to be a radical departure from the logics and practices of governmentality. This is not just another case of sovereignty represented as autonomous power over territory. Instead, ideologies of Seminole sovereignty as independence emerge from a long history of dispossession, domination, genocide, and state paternalism at the hands of the United States. They also take hold alongside notions of sovereignty based on interdependency, in which the multiple governments of reservation, tribal nation, and settler state exist in tension and mutual constitution (Cattelino n.d. [forthcoming]). These experiences and memories lend special currency to the ideal of tribal control, and they show sovereignty to be at once deeply historical and also oriented toward possible futures and a meaningful present. They illustrate the centrality of economy, home, and family both to the processes of settler colonialism and to the realization of indigenous sovereignty. In these and other ways, Seminole housing programs take their shape and meaning through the social and concrete construction of sovereignty.

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