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John Walton Caughey. *McGillivray of the Creeks.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007. Introduction by William J. Bauer Jr. 424 pp. $16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57003-692-7.

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Alexander McGillivray's Lettered Legacy

Originally published in 1938 by the University of Oklahoma Press, *McGillivray of the Creeks* is part biography and part primary source material. Historian John Walton Caughey stumbled on a cache of letters written by the Creek leader in the archives in Spain when he was there on an unrelated research trip. Recognizing their importance, Caughey then saw to the collection and publication of a selection of Alexander McGillivray's correspondence from these Spanish archives as well as from archives in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States. He prefaced the collection with a short, but authoritative, biography of McGillivray. In this new edition, William J. Bauer Jr. updates Caughey's biography by contextualizing McGillivray's life in the current historiography of the eighteenth-century Creek Indians. Bauer also sketches Caughey's career, thus giving some scholarly provenance to the volume. As Bauer notes in the introduction, Caughey's compilation does not contain the full set of McGillivray's letters. He selected those he deemed most pertinent, hence, the selection is biased toward Caughey's own interest in the Spanish borderlands and the imperial contest over the "Old Southwest" after the American Revolution. The book contains mostly McGillivray's correspondence that concerns his negotiations between the United States, Britain, and Spain in regard to Creek political and economic affairs.

Although McGillivray figures in virtually every book written about the Creeks and has been the subject of numerous articles, Caughey's biography is still the only one written about him to date. It continues to hold much ground, but it is out of date and out of step with modern historiography. Certainly the life and times of this interesting and controversial Creek leader deserves a modern, full-length biographical treatment. The republication of this important set of his letters will be indispensable to the future historian who takes on the task of rendering a modern biography of this enigmatic Creek leader or to anyone simply interested in McGillivray's life and times.

The letters reveal a complicated Indian man in a complex time and place. In fact, McGillivray's life and career have generated much historical controversy. As Bauer details in the new introduction, among other things, scholars still debate McGillivray's motives. They question the influence he carried among the Creeks and debate whether he had Creek interests or his own self aggrandizement at heart.

McGillivray was of mixed Creek and Anglo parentage. His father, Lachlan McGillivray, was a well-established Scottish trader of the southern colonies, and his mother, Sehoy, was of mixed descent, part French and part Creek. McGillivray's life typified, in many ways, the rise of what scholars have dubbed a *mixed-blood elite* among southeastern Indians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mixed-blood elites were usually multilingual, could read and write English, and, although many chose to live among their Indian relations and retained much about Indian life, they blended these with life ways not much different from their Euro-American relations. By the end of the eighteenth century, many mixed-blood elites began to adopt market-oriented strategies to accumulate wealth, status, and prestige.

This was the very time that McGillivray was coming of age, and he was, by all accounts, a man of his times. As a young man and just before the outbreak of the American Revolution, McGillivray went to Charleston and Savannah for his education–hence his fluency in English and in writing. When he returned to Creek country he began to amass a fortune by controlling the Creek partnership with Paton, Leslie, and Company, the dominant trading company in the region at the time. He soon established a large, southern-style plantation in the heart

of Creek country. Using his connections with Spanish, British, and American officials and traders in the South and exploiting the tripartite imperial rivalry over the Lower South after the American Revolution, McGillivray soon began to exert strong influence over Creek affairs. There can be little doubt that McGillivray had intense interests in the commercial and political affairs of the Creek Confederacy and that he was an adroit politician. Whether his motives derived from personal or national interest, however, remain the subject of much debate.

Because historic American Indian communities were mostly oral societies, scholars of American Indian history reconstruct the Indian past by using documents written by nonnatives, archaeology, and native oral traditions. Of these three sources, documentary evidence is typically the most abundant. But interpreting documents written by outsiders is fraught with difficulties. Outside observers oftentimes did not understand what they were witnessing; they imbued their accounts with their own biases and misconceptions about Indians; their reports are uneven because they typically did not have full access to Indian life; and so on. Native voices are mostly absent or muted in these documents. Hence, historic native voices and motives are difficult to reconstruct, and researchers have long bemoaned the paucity of documents written by native people. The letters of McGillivray, an eighteenth-century Muskogee (Creek) leader, are a wondrous exception to this general state of documentary affairs.

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