

- Sarah McConnell: Last year, the number of displaced people in the world reached a new high, almost 71 million people.
- Speaker 2: So this is the main road along the coast now. And these are people who've just arrived off boats.
- Speaker 3: They've come on foot. A lot of them arrived at the train station in [inaudible 00:00:19], which is the station over the border in Hungary.
- Speaker 4: There are Afghans here. There are Iranians. There are Iraqis from all over the country, and, of course, many, many Syrians, all fleeing the conflict in their countries.
- Sarah McConnell: These refugees are fleeing war or political violence at home, but their flight can also be treacherous. Many cross turbulent waters, vast deserts, or militarized borders. So what does it take for them to heal psychologically and physically from the wounds of their displacement? From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason. I'm Sarah McConnell. Today, a woman who fled Iraq who saved her life and the life of her infant daughter.
- Farah Ibrahim: Becoming apparent that kind of thing basically intensified through the love that I carried for my child every day, and I didn't want to be another number in the victim list.
- Sarah McConnell: Later in the show, why mental healthcare for immigrants and refugees required unique forms of therapy.
- Al Fuentes: Let us heal but just the individual person, but also, we need to heal communities. We need to heal families. We need to heal relationships that have been broken.
- Sarah McConnell: But first, Dr. Fern Hauck is a physician and professor of family medicine at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. She's also founder of the International Family Medicine Clinic at UVA. She joins us in the studio along with Farah Ibrahim. Farah became a patient at the International Family Medicine Clinic after she and her baby arrived in Charlottesville, Virginia as refugees. She later worked as an interpreter for other families at the clinic. Fern, what caused you to create the International Family Medicine Clinic? What year was this?
- Dr. Fern Hauck: I started the clinic in 2002, and the reason was, I was seeing patients who were refugees and I was really excited actually because I had worked on the Thai-Cambodian border with Cambodian refugees. So I had that interest to start with. So patients were showing up in our clinic really unannounced. I mean, they'd appear on people's schedules, the doctor's schedules, and they would discover that A, they often didn't speak English. B, they were new refugees to our community. And we had no information about them. So I did and little research, and I discovered that the International Rescue Committee or IRC is the

resettlement agency here in Charlottesville. And they had established an office about three or four years prior to that.

Dr. Fern Hauck: So they were resettling refugees in our community, but their obligation to the refugees was basically to take them to the health department for an initial evaluation. After that, sometimes the refugees would show up in the IRC office and say, "I have a headache," or "I have a sore throat," or I have something even more significant. So we were seeing some of these folks appear in our office. So maybe a child would go to pediatrics or an adult would go to our clinic or medicine. The pregnant women might go to OB-Gyn. So we've got, in one family maybe not speaking English, going to three or four different clinics within the massively large health system. And then so I started thinking wow, this is really an opportunity for us to provide excellent primary care to families and really do it one location.

Sarah McConnell: Where are most of these people from back in early 2000s?

Dr. Fern Hauck: In the early 2000s, the largest group were coming from Afghanistan. This was on the wave of the Taliban. We had some from Somalia and a smattering of other African countries. Following that, we then started seeing more people from the Middle East, Iraq, some from Iran, just a few, Syria more recently, and then we saw some from Nepal who had immigrated from Bhutan, which is in East Asia. We had some people from Myanmar who were ethnic minorities who had fled from Myanmar into refugee camps in Thailand. At that time, we had some professional interpreters on staff, primarily Spanish, but we did not have interpreters who spoke Dari, which is the language of Afghanistan, or Arabic, or any of the other languages, so the university, the health system put together a large volunteer pool. So these were not trained people, but they were people who were available to come into the clinic when needed.

Sarah McConnell: Initially, was Farah, hi, Farah.

Farah Ibrahim: Hello.

Sarah McConnell: Were you one of these interpreters at some point?

Farah Ibrahim: I was actually one of the trained interpreters, so I came later. I started in 2008.

Sarah McConnell: Were you ever, when you first arrived, confused by the medical system and how to get treatment for your infant daughter?

Farah Ibrahim: Oh my God, yes. It's a huge hospital. Generally, in Middle East, you don't believe in preventive care, you only react when your child is sick. And you go to a clinic and wait until ... like first come, first serve kind of system. So learning to establish a family doctor and receiving medication and learning how to navigate a huge building was also a learning experience.

Sarah McConnell: And having to make an appointment.

Farah Ibrahim: Yeah, absolutely.

Sarah McConnell: What brought you, as a refugee, to the United States?

Farah Ibrahim: I left Iraq in 2007 after I lost my brother. He was a pharmacist, and he had a pharmacy. His car was stolen. He went to report it and then got shot by Al Qaeda. A few months later, I had my child and that kind of pain basically intensified through the love that I carried for my child every day. And I didn't want to be another number in the victim list, so when I had the opportunity to leave Iraq and go to Jordan where I sought refugee status, I did.

Sarah McConnell: When you landed in America in Charlottesville, Virginia, was it still a bewildering experience as a new single mother with a small infant? How old was she?

Farah Ibrahim: She was 15 months when I came. And yeah, so when I left, my husband couldn't join me. He wasn't allowed to enter Jordan. He was sent back. It's mixed feeling. One, it was too quiet. You don't hear a lot of things going on. It was interesting because your expectation, your knowledge if the US is based on maybe mostly media, movies, sitcoms, things like that. And you come to a small town, how am I going to get around? Or how things are going? So it's a lot of learning as you go, but the adjustment was still a process.

Sarah McConnell: Fern, eventually Farah became a trained interpreter. How are people like Farah useful to you?

Dr. Fern Hauck: As an example, I'm my clinic when we first started this, we had one phone line for the entire clinic, which is pretty large. And then now we have a phone in every single room, at the front desk, in our procedure rooms, plus we have video capability. And plus, we do still access live, we say live, people who can come to the office to interpret for us. We use the live interpreters for specific situations, more complicated patients like the surgery department or ear, nose, and throat. It's helpful to have a person there who can interpret. A lot of the other problems, we can use the phone interpreter and that works fine. But we are so committed to wanting to be sure we can communicate clearly. It's so essential that we basically require I for all visits, and we don't allow children to interpret for their parents.

Sarah McConnell: Why would you not allow a child to interpret for a parent?

Dr. Fern Hauck: Well, if you can imagine a child interpreting some very sensitive questions, for instance, we're taking a sexual history or a substance use history, alcohol history. First of all, the child may not even understand the words in English. And secondly, may be incredibly embarrassed to ask the question, so probably would not ask the question accurately.

Farah Ibrahim: The trained interpreter is required to interpret everything that has been said by the provider and the patient, but additionally, sometimes the interpreter intervenes and explains a little bit about a cultural thing to clarify the communication or assist in more understanding for the communications.

Dr. Fern Hauck: It's kind of funny, one situation I had I was speaking to a patient in Arabic and the patient was from Iraq. And I said to the interpreter, I don't remember the exact question, but I was asking for some explanation about a custom that I wasn't familiar with. And he said, "Well, I think your patient is speaking with a different action, I believe from a different country. I'm from Egypt, so I can't answer that question." So you can't even make the assumption that the language alone is going to get you to what you want to get to if you want some cultural information.

Sarah McConnell: Give me some other instances where you had obstacles to overcoming cultural sensitivity issues.

Dr. Fern Hauck: I think the biggest challenge for most of our doctors and providers is that we, in America, like to do a lot of prevention. You hit 50, you have your colonoscopy and so forth. Well, when we start suggesting to women that you have a mammogram or a pap smear, they say, "I feel fine. I don't need this." We do spend a lot of time trying to explain the reason why we do that. And I think most people generally do start believing that it's fine and once they develop their trust with their provider, that helps a lot too because then they're going to want to do what their provider is recommending.

Sarah McConnell: Can you tell that other refugees, over the years that you have been involved with it, have been relieved to have a place they can go where all of their medical needs are sort of attended to in one area?

Farah Ibrahim: Absolutely. If the child is being seen for a sick visit and they need to get their x-rays or something like that, it's all in the same building versus trying to navigate or drive. You can't even drive. When you're a refugee, especially the first few months, you don't have all your documentation required to issue an Id so that you can study and take the test for driving. So that's another thing, relying on public transportation. Having the International Family Medicine as also part of the health system was really helpful because it was also accessible.

Sarah McConnell: Your husband was trained as a nuclear engineer when he first came over to America.

Farah Ibrahim: Yeah.

Sarah McConnell: And you had gone through training and education for civil engineering. You had to find new ways to find work in America that weren't necessarily exactly what you had been schooled for.

Farah Ibrahim: Yes. When you arrive here, the government have limited financial support for you, and you have about three to six months to become self-sufficient, and that's in the term of covering your basic needs. So in that timeline, you need to find a job and be able to pay and cover your basic needs like parental and food and all that, utility and things like that. So when we arrive, when I arrived and then my husband later, our priority was for survival. And the most important part for us is to be able to cover our expenses and become self-sufficient. So now we own our home, and my husband is still being promoted through job. We consider ourselves middle class now. And I'm loving what I'm doing. The fortunate event of starting as an interpreter is that it introduced me to the human services and that field that I was learning as I was going. And I really fell in love with it, then I liked it.

Sarah McConnell: And you both became naturalized Americans.

Farah Ibrahim: Yes, yeah. He got his naturalization in 2016. I got it almost six years after arrival, so mine was in 2013.

Sarah McConnell: Congratulations.

Farah Ibrahim: Thank you. My daughter had to also get naturalized, so we applied for the process, and it took us a few months. And then she went to the Lincoln Cottage in D.C. and took the oath. And that was also a wonderful day for us.

Sarah McConnell: So what is the implication for people like you, for you and your family, with the Trump administration reducing the number of refugees who can enter the country for other places?

Farah Ibrahim: I have to be honest and say it's really painful personally because when I hear it, I don't hear it as a policy, or security, or safety issue to the country that is now my country. I see it from a family perspective. I see it from a mother who's being told that she will never see her child possibly because they can't travel to come here and see you unless you can afford, after you get all the documentation, to go acknowledge and visit knowing that this child might be in danger and you might lose them. That's how I see it. I see it from the family relationship, and it's so painful.

Dr. Fern Hauck: Well, I can see this from so many different perspectives. When I see the numbers of refugees that are being allowed into our country going down each year, it's very, very distressing and upsetting to me. There are about 25 million refugees in the world, and we're taking now 30,000 at max this year. I mean, that's a tiny number, so it just upsets me greatly to think of so many refugees who are sitting in refugee camps or communities all over the world and are suffering so greatly.

Farah Ibrahim: And if I could add, these people on different type of ... Some people are in refugee camps, some people are in urban cities, and some scatter little over the

world. For me, if I did not have that opportunity to come here and then petition for unification, I wouldn't be now in this situation where I'm a taxpayer. I'm a provider, and I'm also safe. Versus if I was there in this current time, I might have been forced to go back to face death.

Sarah McConnell: That was Farah Ibrahim and Dr. Fern Hauck, the founder of the International Family Medicine clinic at the University of Virginia. Coming up next, how can refugees heal from their psychological wounds? Being displaced from your home is traumatic. That's something Al Fuertes knows firsthand. As a young man, he fled from war and political violence in the Philippines. Now he's devoted to healing others. Fuertes teaches conflict resolution and immigration studies at George Mason University. Al, you just got back from a trip to the Philippines where you brought college students to work with victims of human trafficking there. What was that like for them?

Al Fuertes: The Philippines is actually a hub for human trafficking in Southeast Asia, and so participants in my program will have a direct opportunity to work and spend several days with different groups of children and young people, many of them their age, who have been victims of human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking and labor trafficking. From Manila to Davao in Southern Philippines to Dumaguete in central Philippines, you could just imagine the richness of the experiential learning that goes with it. It's different when you study human trafficking in a classroom compared to really associating a human face to this, to finally work directly with former victims and survivors of sex and labor trafficking is really something that is just mind-boggling for many of them. But at the same time, it also kind of inspires them and challenges them to learn more about the complexity of this problem.

Sarah McConnell: You were raised in the Philippines. You were born there. What was it like for you growing up as a young boy when Marcos instituted martial law? Could you even remember what that was like?

Al Fuertes: Yes, I was five years old when former president, Marcos, declared martial law from 1972 until '81 I think. And I still remember vividly how the entire country was terrorized. I still remember many of my older friends during that time who were very outspoken and were very critical of the Marcos regime. And many of them ended up being abducted and really summarily, sorry to use this term, summarily executed, not because they committed crimes, but simply because they were anti-government.

Sarah McConnell: How did experiencing that, the violence of that, the suffering from that, influence the work that you're doing now?

Al Fuertes: Oh, well, thank you for that question. I never thought that experience would actually become a catalyst. I experienced so much trauma during that time. I started harboring so much anger, so much animosity, particularly towards the Philippine army and the Philippine government that there were even moments I

had to go up to the mountain, and I'm no longer ... I'm very much open to sharing this part of my personal narrative. There were moments when I had to go up to the mountain out of anger, out of desperation and ask representatives of the rebel forces how could I join their movement.

Sarah McConnell: Sure.

Al Fuentes: You know, so you could just imagine the very thing that I hated the most almost became my outlet. That was the irony of it. I despise war. I despise armed conflict, but during that time when I became extremely frustrated and almost helpless and hopeless given the situation, that actually almost became my outlet. But then, despite this, my activism, my passion toward helping the community continued. You know? That instead of running away, instead of becoming numb and desensitized, I think I became even more active in terms of extending what I understood to be social justice. Five years later in 1995, I was given the opportunity, I was given a full scholarship by the Mennonite Central Committee to pursue a master's degree in peace studies in the United States.

Sarah McConnell: So where did you go?

Al Fuentes: I went to the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. And that is when I really confronted my traumas, my anger, and all the destructive and negative effects of that war experience. There was one afternoon when the lecture of our professor was all about forgiveness. And then I still remember vividly, throughout the entire three hour period, I was yelling at her. I mean, vividly yelling at her, "What right do you have to talk to me, to tell me about forgiveness? Who are you to tell me to forgive my enemies? You haven't even been to my community. You don't even know my story."

Al Fuentes: And after the class, I followed her to her office and apologized because I was embarrassed. But then, that evening, I started to reflect and then I realized that what I needed from my professor during that time was for her not to talk to me about forgiveness, but to sit next to me and listen to my story. I wanted my professor to listen to why I am so angry, why I am so filled with negativity. I think what I needed from my professor was validation or affirmation.

Sarah McConnell: And it showed you what you need to give to others as you go to these war-torn areas, or these areas where people are experiencing so much trauma.

Al Fuentes: That's right, that's right. That's right. Now that I am a practitioner, I travel in all continents working with governments and rebel forces on issues related to conflict transformation and psychosocial trauma healing. I'm very cognizant of this fact.

Sarah McConnell: As you travel all over the world to Rwanda and other places of war and disaster, what have you learned, including from a year that I understand you made yourself live in a refugee community?

Al Fuentes: Yes, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah McConnell: What have you learned firsthand is most helpful in the process of healing?

Al Fuentes: First lesson that I have learned is that if there is a way for us to prevent the emergence of war or armed conflict, let's do it. Let's try to really maximize and exhaust other alternative ways to address and resolve our problems and disputes because once war is waged, the result, the aftermath would be for the rest of our lives. Another major lesson is that even in the midst of mass genocide because I also work in the Balkans, I also work in Cambodia that experienced mass genocide during the Khmer Rouge regime. I would like to also emphasize the fact that forgiveness and reconciliation is possible provided that it is consultative. There is a political will. There is a degree of sincerity on the part of the leaders, and also that the people are given the opportunity to define for themselves what reconciliation is.

Al Fuentes: Whenever we talk about healing, we have to address what we call psychosocial healing, not just mental healing. By that, I meant let us heal not just the individual person, but also we need to heal communities. We need to heal families. We need to heal relationships that have been broken.

Sarah McConnell: If that were applied let's say. To America's Latino community, what would that look like? What do you mean by that?

Al Fuentes: Healing for them has very strong economic and sociopolitical components. What they meant by that based on my ongoing work with that is that if possible, healing must translate into deliverables and not just based on intrapsychic or individual healing.

Sarah McConnell: Let me put food on the table and get me a job where I can earn a living.

Al Fuentes: Precisely, precisely. They would also tell you that healing for them also means immigration reforms. Healing for them means for them to be treated as human beings, for them to be treated with dignity, for them to be reunited because this is a fact. I had the opportunity to ask some of the children who are being separated from their parents. I asked them what does healing mean to you. In their language, they would say healing means reunification. Healing means being able to see my brothers and sisters once again.

Sarah McConnell: Right.

Al Fuentes: And then when I asked some of the parents they would say healing means being able to sleep at night without fear of agents to come barge in the middle of the night and then just disperse the families and separate them. For me, part of the healing mechanism in this context is for us, people here, particularly members of the mainstream, for us to understand this whole issue of immigration from a non-Western perspective. Many of them come from extremely violent

environment, whether in Guatemala, in El Salvador, in Honduras, or Nicaragua that had they not left, they would say perhaps they have become part of all these gangs. Or maybe they have already been killed a long time ago. And I always entice my students to look at the whole immigration issue from the perspective of where these people are coming from.

Sarah McConnell: Al Fuertes is a professor in the School in Integrative Studies at George Mason University. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back. Welcome back to With Good Reason. From Virginia Humanities, I'm Sarah McConnell. Earlier in the show, we heard from people who had traveled across vast oceans to reach the United States. But even right here in North America, people have always been in motion. Some migrate for economic reasons. Others are scattered by war and colonization.

Sarah McConnell: Charles Thompson, Jr. is a professor of cultural anthropology and documentary studies at Duke University. He's also a former fellow at Virginia Humanities. In his book, *Border Odyssey*, he narrates his journey from a small organic farm in North Carolina to the nearly 2,000-mile long border between the US and Mexico. There's a wonderful passage right near the start of your book. I love how you describe the touching moment when you encountered a silent protest by a group of very dignified elderly Mexicans.

Charles T.: The Braceros.

Sarah McConnell: Yes, the Braceros.

Charles T.: They were in their 80s. They had worked in the United States between the years 1942 and '64. And their protest was about simply receiving the social security-like benefits that they had paid for back when they were working in the US. We invited them to work here, and they had given their all and helped us win the world war. They, like our social security program, had actually paid into an escrow account expecting that they would get that back in their old age and their families could benefit from that. But, in fact, that money never had arrived. So it was their money. It wasn't a gift from the US. It was their money. And they were simply in silent protest every week, every Sunday, asking for that payment.

Sarah McConnell: You describe this so well in a chapter entitled Evidence of Things Not Seen. Could you read a bit?

Charles T.: Sure. Nearly 200 people, none of them younger than 75, crowded around us. My wife, Hope and I had accompanied our friend Pancho to visit these Braceros on a Sunday morning in Bonito Juarez park and Sierra Juarez, Mexico. When I asked if I might take some photos of them, regular candid shots is what I had in mind. They began moving toward us, surrounding us, getting so close that each individual face filled the frame. They formed a line with each one wanting his

turn, each set of eyes asking that I not leave anyone out. They had me for the entire morning.

Charles T.: I felt so bad about the possibility that as I took photographs, that I was giving the impression that I was taking these back to the US and somehow in an official capacity could make everything all right for them. I decided to stand up on a park bench and say to the group, "ladies and gentlemen," I'm speaking in Spanish at this point. "I don't represent the US government." And just as I did that, I realized that I am a representative of the US government in the same way that every citizen is. And it is our job, our responsibility to interpret what citizenship means here in a democratic and I think a caring way. And so by the time I finished my paragraph standing up on the park bench, I was saying to them I would do my best with these photographs to take their stories and share them.

Sarah McConnell: Charlie, tell me how you came to be introduced to the world of Mexican migrant workers. You were a farmer then.

Charles T.: I was a farmer in North Carolina, organic farmer harvesting most everything on my own. And one week when my two-acre blackberry crop came into production full swing, I realized there was no way I could make my deliveries and do all of the harvesting that I needed to do. And someone told me I maybe should go by this local poultry plant. I went by the chicken plant, let a foreman know that I needed some workers that afternoon. And that very day, five men from the state of Nayarit, Mexico drove into my driveway still wearing their black runner boots and their hair protection and all of that, that they had on in the poultry processing line.

Charles T.: And right away, even though we were unable to communicate very directly, I didn't speak Spanish then. They didn't speak English. And I realized they, right away, knew exactly how to harvest. They were farmers from Mexico. A lot of people don't think about the international connections that we have and how farming in an international language.

Sarah McConnell: How long ago was this? When were you an organic farmer?

Charles T.: The first year of production of those blackberries came into their full harvest in 1985, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the home of UNC. We were truly a local market, but some of my help had traveled thousands of miles to produce local produce.

Sarah McConnell: Eventually, you gave up farming and went back to school.

Charles T.: That's right. I became more interested in the stories of farmworkers and the stories of immigration than I was interested in farming.

Sarah McConnell: What year was it that you launched into your border odyssey as you call it, living and traveling along the entire length of the US-Mexican border?

Charles T.: The year 2010.

Sarah McConnell: And how long is the border?

Charles T.: The border is around almost exactly 2,000 miles. It's 1,969 by some count.

Sarah McConnell: Landscape-wise, did any of it surprise you?

Charles T.: Well, there's nothing more striking than getting out of an air-conditioned car in 115-degree dry heat and realizing that people have walked for days across this kind of landscape, and realized that if I fell down and broke an ankle or something that I would die in a few hours.

Sarah McConnell: What did you make of the wall? There's no one wall, right? There are just portions of a wall here or there and further along?

Charles T.: The wall covers about 700 miles, and there are different styles. The one that's most striking was the landing strips of first gulf war back when George H.W. Bush was in office. We went into Kuwait. Those planes landed on some metal landing strips, and then those were brought back and put upright, and that was a border wall. There were also vehicle barriers. There's some places where you can just walk under this barrier where there's a flood gate. I just walked under. And then there are some places that are the old barbed wire. And some places don't have anything. The idea is that they would put up walls where the people were coming across most. And this makes the migrants have to go out into more remote areas where it's more dangerous for them. And so it's increased the deaths. We've had thousands of deaths in the deserts.

Charles T.: And I think in a sort of cruel way, this was supposed to teach people from Latin America that it was too dangerous to try, but that hasn't worked that way. These are people fleeing for their lives, so a desert isn't going to turn them around. And back to what we were saying about my farm, I think that we will continue to need people to do work. The question that I have is how do we structure an immigration program that allows people their human dignity and also acknowledges that we have a mutual dependence.

Sarah McConnell: There's a striking photograph of one section of a wall on the cover of your book. This is a very tall fence with upright poles, and you could see the people on the other side. Maybe they are playing soccer.

Charles T.: That's right. This is in Tijuana, but this scene that you described was on the day that Mexico had beaten France and the World Cup in 2010. And people were celebrating on the Mexican side. And I walked up to border guards, and I said, "What's going on?" And they said, "They're always trying to taunt us. There's

something going on there." But suddenly they whisked away in their four-wheelers. And on the other side was this party going on. It wasn't that they were trying to taunt the border patrol. They were having a party, and they didn't care what was going on in the US because they had just won in their most important sport, soccer.

Charles T.: And then suddenly, this soccer ball comes across from Mexico into the US. And before I could even get there, an 18-year-old guy slips through the fence, gets the ball, kicks it across, and goes back inside of Mexico before I could even get there. It's that realization, it captures that realization that walls don't really stop people. And it brought back that quote from Robert Frost about we have to be careful when we're building a wall about what we're walling in as well as walling out.

Sarah McConnell: Well, Charlie Thompson, thank you for sharing your insights with me and With Good Reason.

Charles T.: Thank you so much.

Sarah McConnell: Charles Thompson Jr. Teaches anthropology and documentary studies at Duke. His next book, *Going Over Home*, will be released in September. Coming up, how movement and resettlement have informed Cherokee identity. Here in the United States, migration, displacement, and exile are central to the story of many communities, but there's a group of people not always included in these displacement stories, Native Americans. Gregory Smithers is a professor of history at Virginia Commonwealth University and the author of *The Cherokee Diaspora*. He says the US policy of removing native people from their lands has ultimately transformed what it means to be a Cherokee.

Sarah McConnell: Greg, isn't it counterintuitive that Native Americans are seen and treated almost like foreigners?

Gregory S.: Yeah, and that's something that Native Americans have been struggling with and encountering for many centuries. It's important to remember that it wasn't until 1924 with the Indian Citizenship Act that Native Americans acquired the protections and the rights of native-born citizens. And they had to fight very hard for that. And the reason they had to fight so hard is that many political leaders in the United State at that time perceived American Indians as, in some ways, foreign.

Sarah McConnell: Did government officials want early Native Americans to become citizens? Were they pressured to become citizens?

Gregory S.: There was pressure from a very small segment of the American political elite, people like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Rush, the famous physician in Philadelphia who believed that Native Americans, their future, rested in them assimilating into white American culture. Jefferson's idea was that after three

generations of intermarriage, Native Americans would be fully assimilated in a biological sense into the white American population.

Sarah McConnell: Tell me of this story of the Cherokee, where they once lived in North America.

Gregory S.: Well, the Cherokee country is vast, so it extends from Southwestern Virginia across through Tennessee and Kentucky through Alabama and Georgia, parts of South Carolina and, of course, North Carolina. And Europeans quickly recognized that this is a very clearly defined people that have a clear sense of themselves. And they are militarily and economically strong. They're critical players in the region. For the English, for instance, they needed the Cherokee. The Cherokee controlled the Tennessee River, for example, which was originally known as the Cherokee River, which is indicative of the strength that the Cherokee people had in the region.

Gregory S.: Many travelers often reported back and published pamphlets on their experiences in Cherokee country. And what they describe is a very well organized series of communities focused on tightly-knit townships located along rivers and with a very clear sense of a matriarchal structure to society where women governed how resources are distributed among Cherokee people. This was in some ways disturbing to Europeans. Some Europeans described the Cherokee as living under a petticoat government, which was certainly anathema to the type of patriarchy that Europeans were more accustomed to and, which they associated with civilization.

Sarah McConnell: After the Civil War, many freed African Americans claimed to be citizens of the Cherokee Nation. Were they, and why did they do that? Why would that help them?

Gregory S.: The Cherokee people began to adopt racial slavery in the late 18th century. In fact, when the Civil War broke out in 1861, there were roughly two and a half thousand African Americans enslaved by Cherokee slave owners. But at the same time, African Americans and Cherokees did also intermarry. How do we determine then that you have "Cherokee blood"? This was no easy thing after the Civil War.

Sarah McConnell: And why would African Americans who do have Cherokee blood want to make a point of noting that?

Gregory S.: Well, it was part of their identity, and they made it very clear in their petitions to the Cherokee Nation and to the Bureau of Indian Affairs after the Civil War that they wanted nothing in terms of monetary benefits from the Cherokee Nation. What they wanted was a piece of their humanity, their selfhood, recognized. But they struggled with a Cherokee bureaucracy in the late 19th century that was deeply wedded to an anti-black racism. And what Cherokee leaders suspected was that these refugees of the Civil War were in actual fact opportunistic, trying to benefit from the Cherokee treasury.

Sarah McConnell: The Cherokees established a commission to make people prove ancestry?

Gregory S.: That's correct. They established the Cherokee Citizenship Commission in the 1870s. The commission took over the responsibility of determining who was and was not a Cherokee by blood from the Cherokee supreme court. The Citizenship Commission received applicants from people claiming to be Cherokee who were living in Hawaii, for example. The Cherokee had intermarriage laws that made it possible for non-Cherokees who intermarried into the Cherokee nation to get land, to access Cherokee funded education. These were all things that the Cherokee Nation were quite leery of when it came to foreigners who were claiming that they had intermarried with a Cherokee individual.

Sarah McConnell: You write that after the Cherokees themselves establish this commission to prove ancestry, the federal government took that idea and created something in 1887 called the Dawes Commission. What was that?

Gregory S.: Well, the Dawes Commission was designed to abolish Native American territorial sovereignty and to determine who was and was not a Native American based upon blood quantum. So for example, you might hear people say they are half Cherokee or they are one-quarter Choctaw. And that genealogy in the 1880s and 1890s was used to allocate individual allotments of land on what had once been the sovereign nations of, for instance, the Cherokee people or the Creek Nation in Indian Territory and so on.

Gregory S.: You could not acquire a land allotment of up to 160 acres without being able to demonstrate your Native American blood. But at the same time, there were other Native Americans throughout the West who wanted nothing to do with the federal government, and so they refused to do to the Dawes commissioners and register. That has ramifications to this day. Those people are not recognized on the Dawes Rolls, which are critically important to determining whether you have a legitimate case for Cherokee citizenship.

Sarah McConnell: How many people claim Cherokee tribal membership today, and how many claim Cherokee ancestry today roughly?

Gregory S.: Yeah, those are two separate questions. The Cherokee Nation, which is based in Oklahoma, has a little over 300,000 people. But as of the last census, there were well over 800,000 Americans who self-identified as Cherokee. And this is a number that continues to increase.

Sarah McConnell: We can't talk about the Cherokees without going back to the infamous Trail of Tears. We've all heard of it but tell us again when that took place and how many people were involved.

Gregory S.: Well, the interesting thing about the Trail of Tears is that it was originally known to Cherokees as the Great Immigration. Well, this was part of American politics and political discourse in the early 19th century, what to do with the Indian.

There were deep division about what to do with Native Americans. This was complicated by the notion that Native Americans were a conquered people. And in fact, some political leaders in the early 19th century perceived Native Americans like the Cherokees as foreigners and wanted them out of the Eastern United States.

Gregory S.: It was a deeply traumatic episode in Cherokee history and, in fact, one soldier who was involved in the removal of Cherokee people on 1838 and 1839 referred to it as the cruelest work I have ever known. There were between 12 and 17,000 Cherokees who were forced from their ancestral homelands in Georgia, northeastern Georgia, and they were rounded up to migrate westward. Of those, approximately 4,000 Cherokees passed away as they traveled to Indian Territory in modern-day eastern Oklahoma.

Sarah McConnell: But there was a fierce debate over whether this was just and should happen among ordinary American people.

Gregory S.: An intense debate, yeah. Typically, you had northern whites who were opposed to the removal of Native Americans. Northern whites saw the idea of removing Native Americans from the Southeast as an example of the South trying to aggressively expand their version of settler colonialism that involved the dispossession of Native American people and the replacing of those Native American people with slave plantations throughout the frontier of the American south.

Sarah McConnell: I wonder, flipping this, that now, Native Americans often view non-native Americans as foreigners on their lands.

Gregory S.: That's absolutely true. If you drive down to North Carolina and you visit the eastern band of Cherokees, when you drive onto the reservation there is a sign that will greet you welcoming you to our country. And I think that's sort of a wonderful reflection of how Native Americans are trying to reassert that they were here first and that when you enter their reservations, you're entering their sovereign territory.

Sarah McConnell: Fascinating. Well, Gregory Smithers, this has been wonderful. Thank you for talking to me today on With Good Reason.

Gregory S.: It's been my pleasure.

Sarah McConnell: Gregory Smithers is a professor of history at Virginia Commonwealth University. He's the author of *The Cherokee Diaspora, an Indigenous History of Migration, Resettlement, and Identity*.

Sarah McConnell: Major support for With Good Reason is provided by the law firm of McGuireWoods. With Good Reason is produced in Charlottesville by Virginia Humanities. Our production team is Allison Quantz, Elliot Majerczyk, and Cass

This transcript was exported on Aug 15, 2019 - view latest version [here](#).

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