The Cherokee, in addition to many other Native American tribes, used natural products to cure a variety of ailments. *Nyssa sylvatica* is a species commonly known as the blackgum tree. The bark of this tree was used to treat fevers, cancer, gonorrhea, wounds, urinary tract infections, and intestinal worms. Following their usage, the Natural Products Research Group sought to investigate the bioactivity of this plant and determine if antibacterial, antifungal, cytotoxic, and/or antiparasitic activities exist.

**Methods**

**Initial Extraction**
- Dried and cut bark placed in a Soxhlet extractor and extracted with chloroform

**Fractionation**
- Preparative flash chromatography using a hexane and ethyl acetate mixture

**Recrystallization**
- Bioactivity screening for cytotoxicity and antileishmanial activity
- NMR and X-ray crystallography

**Results**

- The extracts were tested for cytotoxic and anti-leishmanial activity. The crude extracts showed promising cytotoxic activity on MDA-MB-231 human breast tumor cells. However, once the extracts were further fractionated, no fractions showed cytotoxicity on any cell lines.
- Fractions were sent to a lab in Brazil for antiparasitic screening, but results have not been sent back yet.
- Identification through NMR and X-ray crystallography has shown fractions of friedelin, taraxerol, and epi-taraxerol.
- Friedelin: a triterpene shown to have anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and antipyretic effects
- Taraxerol and epi-taraxerol: Both terpenoids that have been shown to have cytotoxic activity

**Conclusions**

Based on the Cherokee uses for the bark, it is believed that anti-parasitic activity should be present. If the anti-leishmanial assays return positive results, it is actually better that no cytotoxic activity came to be, as the compounds should kill parasites and not mammalian cells. More research needs to be conducted for full results.

**Acknowledgements**

Acknowledgements go out to Dr. Debra M. Moriarity and her students Shaylee Green and Desalyn Johnson for their help in cytotoxicity screening, Dr. Joyce Kelly da Silva for conducting antileishmanial assays, Jeanette A. Krause from the University of Cincinnati for help with structure determination, UAH Office of the Provost, UAH Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, and the Alabama Space Grant Consortium.