

## Treatment of Native Americans

By 1820, the United States had doubled in size and was already one of the largest countries in the world. The demand for land kept growing, however. People wanted land to grow cotton, and settlers wanted land for new homes and communities. Yet Native American tribes inhabited much of the valuable land that the U.S. government wanted. While the young country was attempting to grow bigger and stronger, the Native Americans were trying to maintain life as they knew it.

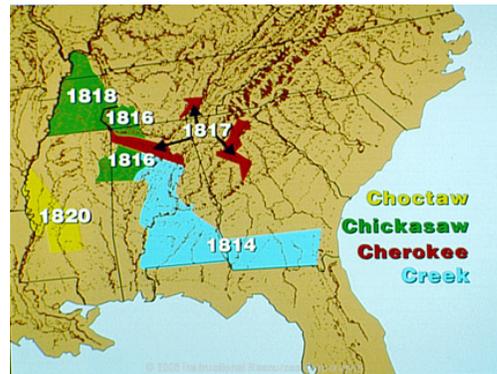
Deals between Native Americans and colonists were seldom favorable to Native Americans. Some settlers believed that the tribes did not need land because they were all nomads, travelers without permanent homes. In fact, this was a myth. Many Southeast tribes raised crops and lived in villages. These tribes suffered greatly as the United States government took more and more land. Nomadic tribes suffered as well. They had to leave the rivers, forests, and mountains and move to a very different topography.

At first, the native tribes were given a choice of sorts. They had to either adopt white culture or move off of their land. President Thomas Jefferson offered land out West to the tribes who preferred their own ways. The Native Americans who chose to adopt white culture were called

*accommodationists*. The tribes that rejected white culture outright were called *traditionalists*. Later, however, even the accommodationists were forced to forfeit, or give up, their lands to the United States. For this reason, the options presented to the Native Americans were not real choices. Either way, they had to give up their land and lifestyle.

## Tribes Uprooted

Many of the tribes that were uprooted during this time, such as the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw tribes, lived in the southeastern United States. They had similar lifestyles in that they all lived in villages near streams and rivers. They hunted for meat like deer and bear, but they also raised crops such as corn, beans, and squash. Their identity was rooted in their relationship to their landscape. Leaving behind their familiar environment was the same as leaving behind their culture.



A map of Indian land lost to white settlers, 1814-1820. The Creek nation gave up more than twenty million acres in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama to the United States.

The Cherokee were one tribe who tried to accommodate in order to stay on their land. They allowed missionaries to educate their children in English. They adopted new crops and farming techniques. The Cherokee even established a republican government with a court system.

Similarly, some of the Choctaw tried to adopt elements of white culture. For example, they began to add pork and potatoes into their diets. Some Choctaw women used spinning wheels to weave cloth. However, some Choctaw began to move west as early as the late 1700s in order to avoid conflict with white settlers. Those that stayed made treaties with the United States about land boundaries, but the treaties were repeatedly broken.

Eventually, white settlers pressured the government to further expand U.S. territory and move Native Americans farther west. Settlers wanted the valuable farmland in the areas of Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. In response to this demand, President Andrew Jackson pushed the 1830 Indian Removal Act through Congress. He then violated a Supreme Court ruling so that he could displace, or relocate, the Native American tribes west of the Mississippi to a part of the Great Plains. The U.S. army oversaw the displacement of the Cherokee.

Forced to march thousands of miles west, the Cherokee left behind their homes and their crops. They even had to leave their pigs and other livestock. They called this infamous trek “the place where they cried.” We know it now as the Trail of Tears. It took place in winter, and over one-fourth of the 15,000 Cherokee died along the way from brutal conditions, diseases, and starvation. Although the Trail of Tears often refers to the journey endured specifically by the Cherokee, the term also applies to the forced relocation of many Eastern Woodland Native American tribes in the 1830s.

Like the Cherokee, many members of the Choctaw tribe died in the process of relocation. They had to travel through sleet and blizzards while wearing very light clothing. They also ran out of food along the way. In addition, the Native American tribes were exposed to new diseases from the settlers, ones that their bodies could not fight. Many of the Choctaw died during the journey, and those that survived arrived at the new territory in poor condition.

### **Old Ways and New Struggles**

The environment out West was often different from what the displaced tribes were used to. For example, the Cherokee’s crops were flooded out in their first year because the Cherokee weren’t yet familiar with the rivers in their new land. The Choctaw ended up in a wooded mountain region in the southeast

Oklahoma Territory. Although a treaty gave them land farther to the west, this land was a treeless plain, nothing like their original homeland. In addition, nomadic buffalo-hunting tribes such as the Apache lived on these plains and were known to conduct raids. Therefore, the Choctaw and other tribes that were displaced to Oklahoma tended to stay in a relatively small area of the territory. The Chickasaw were not given any land out West in which to settle, so they were forced to lease land from the Choctaw. This made them more dependent on a cash economy and payments from the federal government. They could no longer survive on the surrounding environment alone as they had before. The Native Americans continued to battle foreign illnesses because of exposure to white settlers and unfamiliar tribes.

### Adapting to Survive

Despite the challenges they faced, many displaced tribes learned to adapt to their new homes. They became more familiar with local plants, animals, and weather patterns, which allowed them to produce enough food to survive.

For economic reasons, some tribes, such as the Choctaw, began to raise more crops once they moved west. Crops gave them something to trade and sell. As a result, men spent more time working the fields, and they typically only hunted small animals. Some tribe members even started mills to process their grain. When the railroad came through, they shipped their surplus crops by train. Their respect for the land and all living things began to exist side by side with the desire to use those things for profit in the growing U.S. economy.

Tribes also made efforts to recreate some of their old ways. The Cherokee continued to perform the Green Corn dance in celebration of the corn harvest. The Choctaw continued their tradition of using herbal medicines, although they adapted to the plants available in the area. For example, they used the sycamore bark found in Oklahoma to boil a tea for coughs.

Over time, some tribes created strong social and political identities for themselves. The Chickasaw wrote their own constitution that established separate branches of government. The Cherokee Nation was strengthened by a unified writing system, which was developed by a scholar named Sequoyah.



Cherokee Indian scholar Sequoyah (ca. 1770-1843) with the alphabet of a written Cherokee language, which he developed beginning in 1809.

Thanks to Sequoyah's writing system, the Cherokee were able to retain some of their sense of identity. Schools were established, and the tribe prospered. The Choctaw also drafted a constitution and started schools in the new territory.

Although many Native Americans tribes survived the treatment of the U.S. government and settlers, they experienced great suffering and loss. To this day, tribes continue to educate their members about past injustices. They hope that by doing so, new generations will understand the strength and determination of their people.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

1. What name was given to tribes who were willing to give up some parts of their culture to live more like the white settlers?
  - A. accommodationists
  - B. originalists
  - C. traditionalists
  - D. territorialists
2. What was the forced relocation of Native Americans after the Indian Removal Act called?
  - A. the Green Corn Journey
  - B. the Oklahoma March
  - C. the Western Struggle
  - D. the Trail of Tears
3. What is one way that the Choctaw adapted to life out West?
  - A. They began to grow more crops.
  - B. They stopped using herbal medicines.
  - C. They withdrew from the U.S. economy.
  - D. They started to raid other tribes for food.
4. Consider that Europeans came to America seeking freedom and opportunity. Was it ethical for Europeans to settle on a tribe's ancestral lands? How were the freedoms and opportunities of Native Americans affected by the settlers and their government? Provide details from the passage to support your answer.