

The Rise of the Cotton Kingdom

EMBEDDED IN THE very birth of the United States in 1776 was a contradiction. The Founding Fathers had declared the “self-evident truth” that “all men are created equal,” but in 1787, they wrote into the Constitution a provision that implicitly legalized slavery: the number of representatives each state would send to Congress would be determined by the number of “free persons” and “three fifths of all other persons,” the code phrase for slaves.

By then, slavery had become a waning institution, offering hope that the contradiction between the nation’s principles and what had come to be called the “peculiar institution” would resolve itself. The northern states proceeded to abolish slavery, and many slaveholders in the South were manumitting, or freeing, their slaves. Like Jefferson, they were feeling morally uncomfortable over slavery. Facing problems of soil exhaustion in the tobacco fields of Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina, slaveholders were finding slavery unprofitable. In South Carolina and Georgia, slavery was confined to the coastal region where sea island cotton could be grown. This type of cotton had few seeds and was ideal to process into fiber for textile production. A second type of cotton, short staple cotton, could be grown in the upcountry region, but its abundance of seeds made it prohibitively expensive to extract by hand.

This static and even slumping economy changed in 1793: Eli Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin made it viable to process short staple cotton. After 1800, slavery became enormously profitable not only in the cotton-producing states from Georgia to Texas but also in what became the slave-breeding states of Virginia and Maryland. In turn, cotton production ushered America into the era of the Market Revolution—the “take-off” years that transformed America into a highly complex industrial economy.¹ At the core of this economic boom was the ascendancy of the Cotton Kingdom.

In 1800, the United States had a population of six million, of which only three hundred twenty thousand were listed as urban. A large percentage of the rural population was engaged in subsistence farming, growing food crops mainly for their own needs. Living in the interior regions, many of these farmers found that the transportation of surplus crops to the market was too expensive. The cost of carrying a ton of goods only thirty miles overland was as much as shipping it three thousand miles from America to Europe. Thus, commercial activity was limited to the areas near the seaboard and navigable waterways.

By 1860, however, the U.S. economy had become complex and robust. Advances in transportation such as the steamboat and the railroad now linked the three major regions—the East, West, and South. Each region represented a division of production. New England and the Middle Atlantic states concentrated on manufacturing and commerce and relied on the West for foodstuffs for its growing urban population and the South for raw cotton to supply its textile factories. In 1860, the total value of manufactured goods in the East was \$1,270,937,679, compared to only \$540,137,811 for the other two regions combined. The western states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois exported grain and livestock to the East and South while depending on the East for manufactured goods. In 1860, the West shipped a million barrels of flour and thirty-one million barrels of grain through Buffalo to the East, and \$185,211,254 worth of produce through New Orleans to the South. The South, mainly Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, produced fiber for the textile mills of the East and purchased food from the West and manufactured goods from the East.

The causes of this tremendous economic transformation were multiple. The shipping boom of the early 1800s had enabled merchants like Francis Lowell to accumulate capital to invest in manufacturing ventures. The proliferation of banks and the expansion of the credit system made it possible for farmers to borrow money and buy land for commercial agriculture. Introducing new machinery, technological progress paved the way for factory production. Government intervention in the form of protective tariffs and the development of transportation also contributed to the advance of the market. The transportation revolution laid vast networks of turnpikes, canals, and railroads across the country: between 1815 and 1860, freight charges for shipments overland had been reduced by 95 percent.²

But the most “decisive” impetus of the Market Revolution was cotton. “Cotton was strategic,” observed economist Douglass C.

North, “because it was the major independent variable in the interdependent structure of internal and international trade. The demands for western foodstuffs and northeastern services and manufactures were basically dependent upon the income received from the cotton trade.”³ The tables below do the telling:

Table 1: Indian-land sales and cotton production

Year	Land sales (acres)	Cotton (bales)
1833	1,816,083	559,210
1834	2,388,146	641,435
1835	5,522,474	760,923
1836	5,805,180	788,013
1837	1,259,814	916,960
1838	821,600	747,227
1839	851,586	911,913
1840	401,394	1,538,904
1841	228,699	1,231,334
1842	238,079	1,160,389

Table 2: Slave population

Year	Alabama	Mississippi	Louisiana
1820	41,879	32,814	69,064
1830	117,549	65,659	109,588
1840	253,523	195,211	168,452
1850	342,892	309,878	244,809

Table 3: Value of total exports and cotton exports

Year	Total exports	Cotton exports
1815	\$52,557,000	\$17,529,000
1830	\$71,671,000	\$29,674,883
1840	\$123,669,000	\$63,870,307
1850	\$144,376,000	\$71,984,616
1860	\$333,576,000	\$191,806,555

The development of the cotton export sector depended on the appropriation of Indian lands and the expansion of slavery. The major cotton-producing states—Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana—were carved out of Indian territory. Tribe after tribe in the South was forced to cede its lands to the federal government and move west of the Mississippi River. Eleven treaties of cession were negotiated with these tribes between 1814 and 1824; from these agreements the United States acquired millions of acres of lands, including one-fifth of Mississippi and three-quarters of Alabama. Sales of Indian lands were followed by increases in the slave population in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and the slave population by increases in cotton production.

Dominant in the export trade, cotton was crucial in the development of interregional specialization. The capital derived from the export of cotton to England and France helped to finance enterprises throughout the economy and buttressed the industrialization of America.⁴

The Market Revolution created an even more diverse population, for it led to the massive influx of laborers from Ireland, the incorporation of Mexicans with the annexation of the Southwest territories, and then the migrations of the Chinese east to America. The inclusion of these new groups of Calibans led to a greater “pluribus,” a more racially and culturally diverse “giddy multitude.” The economy fastened these different peoples to each other, their histories woven into the tapestry of a greater “unum” called America. Working in the textile mills of New England, Irish immigrant women manufactured fabric made from cotton grown on former Indian lands and picked by enslaved African Americans; meanwhile, Irish immigrant men labored in New England shoe factories, making shoes from hides shipped by Mexican workers in California. Chinese and Irish railroad workers laid the transcontinental tracks that closed the frontier and changed forever the lives of Indians in the West. America was becoming a nation peopled by the world.

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TOWARD “THE STONY MOUNTAINS”

From Removal to Reservation

Andrew Jackson: “To . . . Tread on the Graves of Extinct Nations”

ON FEBRUARY 16, 1803, President Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to Andrew Jackson, a young political leader in Tennessee: the government should advise the Indians to sell their “useless” forests and become farmers. Three decades later, as president himself, Jackson would forcibly remove even Indian farmers to the West, toward “the Stony mountains.”¹

Jackson’s fortunes were tied to what happened to the Indians. In 1787, he moved from North Carolina to Nashville, where he practiced law, opened stores, and engaged in land speculation—lands that had originally belonged to Indians. Jackson paid \$100 for twenty-five hundred acres at the Chickasaw bluffs on the Mississippi and immediately sold half of this property for \$312. He kept the rest of the land until 1818, when he sold it for \$5,000. Jackson had personally negotiated the Chickasaw treaty and opened the area to white settlement in 1814.

Meanwhile, General Jackson had led American troops against the Creeks in Mississippi, conquering “the cream of the Creek country” for the expansion of the “republick.” During the war against

the Creeks, Jackson called his enemies "savage bloodhounds" and "blood thirsty barbarians." When Jackson learned that hostile Creeks had killed more than two hundred whites at Fort Mims, he vowed revenge. "I know," he told his soldiers, "you will teach the cannibals who reveled in the carnage of our unoffending Citizens at Fort Meems that the thunder of our arms is more terrible than the Earth quakes of their Prophets, and that Heaven Dooms to inevitable destruction the wretch who Smiles at the torture he inflicts and who neither spares female innocence, declining age nor helpless infancy." Denouncing the Indian capture of a white woman who was confined to a post, "naked, lacerated," he urged the "brave sons of Tennessee" to wipe away this "blushing shame."²

Shortly before the battle of Horse Shoe Bend in March 1814, Jackson raged in letters to Major General Thomas Pinckney. "I must distroy those deluded victims doomed to distruction by their own restless and savage conduct." Calling them "savage dogs," he wrote: "It is by the charge I distroy from eight to ten of them . . . I have on all occasions preserved the scalps of my killed." At the battle of Horse Shoe Bend, Jackson and his troops surrounded eight hundred Creeks and killed almost all of them, including the women and children. Afterward, his soldiers made bridle reins from strips of skin taken from the corpses; they also cut off the tip of each dead Indian's nose for body count. Jackson sent clothing worn by the slain warriors to the ladies of Tennessee. In a letter to his wife, he wrote: "The *carnage* was *dreadful* . . . I hope shortly to put an end to the war and return to your arms, kiss my little andrew for me, tell him I have a warriors bow and quiver for him." In a letter to Thomas Pinckney, Jackson boasted that he had conquered Indian lands, the "valuable country" west of the Cosee and north of the "allabama."³

Jackson shrouded the destruction of Indians and the appropriation of their lands in a metaphysical mantle of moral justification. After the bloody victory, Jackson told his troops:

The fiends . . . will no longer murder our women and children, or disturb the quiet of our borders . . . They have disappeared from the face of the Earth. In their places a new generation will arise who will know their duties better. The weapons of warfare will be exchanged for the utensils of husbandry; and the wilderness which now withers in sterility and seems to mourn the desolation which overspreads it, will blossom as the rose, and become the nursery of the arts . . . How lamentable it is that the path to peace should

lead through blood, and over the carcasses of the slain!! But it is in the dispensation of that providence, which inflicts partial evil to produce general good.

His soldiers, Jackson declared, were advancing civilization and progress.⁴

Revered as a hero of Indian wars, Jackson was elected to the presidency of the United States in 1828. He supported the efforts of Mississippi and Georgia to abolish Indian tribal units and allow white settlers to take cultivated Indian lands. As Jackson watched these states violate federal treaties with tribes, he pleaded presidential helplessness. "If the states chose to extend their laws over them," he told Congress, "it would not be in the power of the federal government to prevent it." Actually, treaties and federal laws had given authority over the Indians to Congress, not the states. The 1802 Indian Trade and Intercourse Act had provided that no land cessions could be made except by treaty with a tribe, and that federal rather than state law would operate in Indian territory. In 1832, after the Supreme Court ruled that states could not legally extend their jurisdiction into Indian territory, Jackson simply refused to enforce the Court's decision.⁵

Jackson's claim of presidential powerlessness and his failure to uphold the law functioned as a facade for collaboration and conspiracy. Behind the scene, he was actively working for Indian removal. General John Coffee laid out the strategy. "Deprive the chiefs of the power they now possess," he wrote to the president, "take from them their own code of laws, and reduce them to plain citizenship . . . and they will soon determine to move, and then there will be no difficulty in getting the poor Indians to give their consent. All this will be done by the State of Georgia if the United States do not interfere with her law." All Jackson had to do was stay out of the way.⁶

In Jackson's view, Indians could not survive living within white society. "The fate of the Mohigan, the Narragansett, and the Delaware is fast overtaking the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Creek. That this fate surely awaits them if they remain within the [states] does not admit of a doubt." Like the tribes before them, they would disappear. Driven by "feelings of justice," Jackson declared that he wanted "to preserve this much-injured race." He proposed a solution—the setting aside of a district west of the Mississippi "to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes as long as they shall occupy it." Beyond the borders of white society, Indians would be free to live in peace and to have their own governments

"as long as the grass grows, or water runs." Jackson advised Indians to move to the West. Like whites, they should constantly seek to improve themselves and settle in new places. "Doubtless it will be painful [for Indians] to leave the graves of their fathers," Jackson declared in his first annual message to Congress. "But what do they more than our ancestors did or than our children are now doing? To better their condition in an unknown land our forefathers left all that was dear in earthly objects."⁷

Insisting that he wanted to be "just" and "humane," Jackson claimed his goal was to protect the Indians from the "mercenary influence of white men." Seeking to exercise "parental" control, he regarded himself as a "father," concerned about the welfare of his Indian "children." But if these "children" refused to accept his advice, Jackson warned, they would be responsible for the consequences. "I feel conscious of having done my duty to my red children, and if any failure of my good intentions arises, it will be attributable to their want of duty to themselves, not to me."⁸

Like the early Puritans, Jackson affirmed the "errand into the wilderness" in his justification for Indian removal and even death. What happened to the native people, he argued, was moral and inevitable. Indian graves represented progress—the advance of civilization across America. Nothing, Jackson insisted, was to be "regretted." "Humanity has often wept over the fate of the aborigines of this country, and Philanthropy has been long busily employed in devising means to avert it," Jackson explained in a message to Congress, "but its progress has never for a moment been arrested, and one by one have many powerful tribes disappeared from the earth. To follow to the tomb the last of his race and tread on the graves of extinct nations excite melancholy reflections." But "philanthropy could not wish to see this continent restored to the condition in which it was found by our forefathers." The president then asked: "What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms . . . filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?"⁹

Native Americans saw the chicanery of this metaphysics: Like Caliban cursing Prospero, Cherokee leader John Ross declared that "the perpetrator of a wrong" would never forgive "his victims." But President Jackson maintained a legal and moral posture. During his presidency, Jackson uprooted some seventy thousand Indians from their homes and drove them west of the Mississippi River. He was clearing the way for the rise of the Cotton Kingdom.¹⁰

The Embittered Human Heart: The Choctaws

Instituted by President Thomas Jefferson, the land-allotment program became the principal strategy for taking territory from the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws. In the 1805 Choctaw Treaty, the federal government had reserved certain tracts of land for individual Choctaws. Jefferson told a delegation of chiefs: "Let me entreat you . . . on the land now given to you, to begin to give every man a farm; let him enclose it, cultivate it, build a warm house on it, and when he dies, let it belong to his wife and children after him." The aim of Jefferson's policy was the transformation of the Choctaws into farmers.¹¹

Actually, the Choctaws of Mississippi had been an agricultural people long before the arrival of whites. They employed the slash-and-burn method to clear areas for planting corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and watermelons. To prepare the ground, they used a digging stick, a short heavy pole of hard wood with a sharp point. Then in the early summer, they celebrated the Green Corn Dance, a ceremony to bless the fields. After the harvest, they laid out the corn in small lots to dry, and then layered the corn between grass and clay mortar in little piles, "each covered and arranged side by side," looking "like a big mud dauber's nest." The Choctaws prepared the corn in various ways. "First they roast it in the fire and eat it so," a French traveler reported. "When it is very tender they pound it and make porridge of it, but the most esteemed among them is the cold meal."¹²

Before contact with the strangers from Europe, the Choctaws practiced communalism. After the harvest, the people erected a large granary. "To this each family carries and deposits a certain quantity, according to his ability or inclination, or none at all if he so chooses," reported a visitor. This "public treasury" supplied individual tribal members in need as well as neighboring towns suffering from crop failures. Critical of European individualism and possessiveness, they condemned the English for allowing their poor to suffer from hunger. Trader James Adair reported that the Choctaws were "very kind and liberal to every one of their own tribe, even to the last morsel of food they enjoy."¹³

By the early nineteenth century, many Choctaws had turned to raising cows and pigs in enclosed farms. Chief Franchimastabe explained that Choctaws would now have to raise cattle and live like white men, for the time of "hunting and living by the Gun" was nearly over. Choctaws also cultivated cotton for the market. Some of them had extensive operations: Greenwood LeFlore had

250 acres of cotton fields worked by thirty-two slaves, and David Folsom had 150 acres with a labor force of seventeen slaves. But these markers of civilization did not matter.¹⁴

In January 1830, the Mississippi state government abolished the sovereignty of the Choctaw nation. Any Choctaw who opposed state authority would be subjected to a thousand-dollar fine and a year in prison. In September, federal commissioners met with the Choctaws at Dancing Rabbit Creek to negotiate a treaty for acquiring their lands and removing them beyond the Mississippi. The Choctaw representatives turned down the offer: "It is the voice of a very large majority of the people here present not to sell the land of their forefathers." Thinking that the meeting was over, many Choctaws left. But the federal commissioners refused to accept no for an answer and bluntly told the remaining chiefs that the Choctaws must move or be governed by Mississippi state law. If they resisted, they would be destroyed by federal forces. A treaty was finally secured by intimidation.¹⁵

"We are exceedingly tired," wrote Chief David Folsom in a letter to Presbyterian missionaries. "We have just heard of the ratification of the Choctaw Treaty. Our doom is sealed. There is no other course for us but to turn our faces to our new homes toward the setting sun." Years later, Chief Cobb told Captain J. McRea, an officer in charge of removal: "Brother: Our hearts are full. Twelve winters ago our chiefs sold our country. Every warrior that you see here was opposed to the treaty. If the dead could have counted, it could never have been made, but alas! Though they stood around, they could not be seen or heard. Their tears came in the raindrops, and their voices in the wailing wind, but the pale faces knew it not, and our land was taken away."¹⁶

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek provided that the Choctaws cede all of their 10,423,130 acres to the federal government and migrate to lands west of the Mississippi River. Not all of the Choctaws were required to leave, however. Choctaw families and individuals were instructed to register with an Indian agent within six months after ratification of the treaty if they wished to remain in Mississippi and receive a land grant. Seemingly, the program gave Choctaws a fair chance to succeed in white society as individual landowners.¹⁷

Federal certifying agents, however, proceeded to collaborate with land speculators to transfer Indian tribal lands to individual Indians and then to whites. Speculators took Indians by groups from one agent to another and had them sign contracts for land

grants. Often the speculators were the federal agents themselves. After securing lands for individual Indians, speculators made loans to them in exchange for their titles as collateral, and then they took over the deeds when the Indians failed to repay their debts.

Meanwhile, many white settlers simply took possession of Indian lands. "Owing to the law of the State of Mississippi passed at the last session, granting permission to the whites to settle in the Choctaw Nation," a contemporary reported, "hundreds have come in and are squatting on the lands in all directions." Once Indian lands were occupied, the squatters usually offered to pay for the property. "For the most part, every purchaser of cultivated reservations have made small advances to the Indians, with a promise to pay the balance when the Indians make a good title; which can hardly be effected, owing to the remote residence of the Indians when they remove to the west."¹⁸

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek and the land-allotment program unleashed white expansion: speculators, farmers, and planters proceeded to take Indian lands "legally," while absolving themselves from responsibility for Indian removal. Whites could not be blamed if Indians got into debt, lost their lands, and had to move beyond the Mississippi. "Our citizens were disposed to buy and the Indians to sell," explained Secretary of War Cass. "The improvident habits of the Indians cannot be controlled by [federal] regulations . . . If they waste it, as waste it they too often will, it is deeply to be regretted yet still it is only exercising a right conferred upon them by the treaty." In other words, Indians were responsible for their own ruin. Behind the blame, however, was a hidden agenda. In a letter to General John Coffee, April 7, 1832, President Jackson wrote: "The object of the government now is, to have all their reservations surveyed and laid off as early as we can." Once Indians had been granted their individual land allotments, he added, they would "sell and move to the West."¹⁹

A year after the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, thousands of Choctaws began their trek to the territory west of the Mississippi River. "The feeling which many of them evince in separating, never to return again, from their own long cherished hills, poor as they are in this section of country," wrote an army officer, "is truly painful to witness . . ." But what was even more distressing to see was the suffering. While en route to their new homes, many Choctaws encountered terrible winter storms. One eyewitness recorded the experience of several hundred migrating Choctaws: "There were very aged persons and very young children in the company; many

had nothing to shelter them from the storm by day or night. The weather was excessively cold, and yet not one in ten of the women had even a moccasin on their feet and the great majority of them were walking. One party came to us and begged for an ear of corn apiece [to relieve] their suffering." Not only the cold weather but also diseases like cholera stalked the migrants. Lieutenant Gabriel Rains reported to his general: "The Choctaws are dying to an alarming extent.... Near the agency there are 3,000 Indians and within the hearing of a gun from this spot 100 have died within five weeks. The mortality among these people since the beginning of fall as far as ascertained, amounts to one-fifth of the whole number."²⁰

A French visitor witnessed the Choctaws crossing the Mississippi River on their way to the West. "It was then the middle of winter," reported Alexis de Tocqueville, "and the cold was unusually severe; the snow had frozen hard upon the ground, and the river was drifting huge masses of ice. The Indians had their families with them, and they brought in their train the wounded and the sick, with children newly born and old men upon the verge of death." Before his eyes was a microcosm of the epic story of Indian retreat before white expansion. "Three or four thousand soldiers drive before them the wandering races of the aborigines; these are followed by the pioneers, who pierce the woods, scare off the beasts of prey, explore the courses of the inland streams, and make ready the triumphal march of civilization across the desert." What struck Tocqueville was how whites were able to deprive Indians of their rights and exterminate them "with singular felicity, tranquilly, legally, philanthropically, without shedding blood, and without violating a single great principle of morality in the eyes of the world." Indeed, he wryly remarked, it was impossible to destroy men with "more respect for the laws of humanity."²¹

Uprooted, many Choctaws felt bitter and angry. "The privations of a whole nation before setting out, their turmoil and losses on the road, and settling their homes in a wild world," one of them declared, "are all calculated to embitter the human heart." In a "Farewell Letter to the American People, 1832," George W. Harkins explained why his people had left their ancestral lands: "We were hedged in by two evils, and we chose that which we thought least." The Mississippi legislators, he insisted, were not qualified to become lawmakers for a people so dissimilar in culture as the Choctaws were to whites. A "mountain of prejudice" would continue to obstruct "the streams of justice." Thus the Choctaws chose to "suffer and be free" rather than live under the degrading

influence of laws where their voices could not be heard. They went unwillingly, however, for their attachment to their "native land" was strong. "That cord is now broken," Harkins cried out, "and we must now go forth as wanderers in a strange land!"²²

The total cost of Choctaw removal, including salaries for the agents and fraudulent settlements, was \$5,097,367.50. To pay for these expenses, the federal government sold the Choctaw lands to white settlers and received \$8,095,614.89. In the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, the government had agreed that it would not make any profits from the sales of Choctaw lands. The Choctaws sued in federal court and won \$2,981,247.39, but most of the awarded sum went to pay their lawyers.²³

"The Trail of Tears": The Cherokees

In the beginning, according to Cherokee legend, water covered the earth and all of the animals lived in the sky. One day, a beaver dove into the ocean and created land by bringing mud to the surface and fastening it to the sky with four cords. Then the Great Buzzard flew to earth. "When he reached the Cherokee country, he was very tired, and his wings began to flap and strike the ground, and wherever they struck the earth there was a valley, and where they turned up again there was a mountain." This beautiful land of valleys and mountains became the home of the Cherokees.²⁴

Like the Choctaws in Mississippi, the Cherokees in Georgia were also dispossessed, their lands "legally" moved into the "market." In 1829, the Georgia legislature passed a law extending state authority over the territory of the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokees were given a choice—leave the state or be subjugated by white rule.²⁵

Under the leadership of Chief John Ross, the Cherokees refused to abandon their homes and lands. The federal government, they insisted, was obligated to honor the treaties guaranteeing the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation and the integrity of their territory. In a letter to Secretary of War Lewis Cass on February 6, 1834, Chief Ross condemned Georgia's lawlessness: "The right of property and even the life of the Cherokee is in jeopardy, and are at the mercy of the robber and the assassin. By these acts the citizen of Georgia is licensed to come into immediate collision with the Cherokee individual, by violence, if he chooses, for any and everything that is sacred to the existence of man upon earth. And the Cherokee is denied the right of appearing before the sanctuary of justice created by law for the redress of wrongs." A month later,

Chief Ross wrote directly to President Jackson: "The relations of peace and friendship so happily and so long established between the white and the red man... induces us, as representatives of the Cherokee nation, to address you [as] Father." By treaty, the Cherokee people had placed themselves under the protection of the federal government, which in turn had given "assurances of protection, good neighborhood and the solemn guarantee" for the territorial integrity of the Cherokee nation. A good father, the Cherokee chief insisted, should honor his promises to his children.²⁶

But the appeals fell on deaf ears in Washington. Instead, President Jackson instructed Commissioner J. F. Schermerhorn to negotiate a treaty for Cherokee removal. Schermerhorn secured an agreement from John Ridge, the head of a small proremoval faction of Cherokees. According to the terms, the Cherokees would cede their land and be removed in exchange for a payment of \$3,250,000. The treaty was signed in Washington on March 14, 1835, but it needed to be ratified by the tribe in full council to be valid.

Schermerhorn arranged to present the treaty to the Cherokee council at a meeting in New Echota, Georgia, to be held in December. To Secretary of War Lewis Cass, the commissioner wrote: "We shall make a treaty with those who attend, and rely upon it." What he meant was that only the proremoval faction would be permitted to attend. Before the meeting took place, the Georgia militia jailed Chief Ross and suppressed the Cherokee newspaper in order to restrict information about the meeting and to curb criticism. "The manner of seizure of the public press," Chief Ross protested in a letter to his people, "could not have been sanctioned for any other purpose than to stifle the voice of the Cherokee people, raised by their cries from the wounds inflicted upon them by the unsparing hand of their oppressors, and that the ear of humanity might thereby be prevented from hearing them." With the opposition to removal silenced, Schermerhorn procured a treaty at New Echota.²⁷

The treaty was a sham: only a tiny fraction of the entire Cherokee Nation attended, and none of the tribal officers were present. According to Schermerhorn's own report, only about three to five hundred Cherokees out of a population of over seventeen thousand were present. Chief Ross and the antiremoval Cherokee leaders tried to block the treaty's approval in Congress. "This instrument," they declared to the Senate, "purports to be a contract with the Cherokee people, when in fact it has been agreed upon, in direct violation of their will, wishes, and interest, by a few unauthorized individuals of the [Cherokee] Nation." Some government officials confirmed that the treaty

was indeed a fraud. In a letter to Secretary Cass, Major W. M. Davis described what had actually happened at New Echota: "Sir, that paper... called a treaty, is no treaty at all." It was "not sanctioned by the great body of the Cherokee" and was made "without their participation or assent." Davis charged that "Mr. Schermerhorn's apparent design was to conceal the real number present.... The delegation taken to Washington by Mr. Schermerhorn had no more authority to make a treaty than any other dozen Cherokee accidentally picked up for the purpose." Clearly, the treaty was chicanery; yet President Jackson "relied upon it," and Congress ratified it.²⁸

The treaty let loose thousands of white settlers, who seized the "ceded" lands and forced many Cherokees to abandon their farms. In a letter to President Jackson, pro-removal leader Ridge complained about the injustice and abuse:

We come now to address you on the subject of our griefs and afflictions from the acts of the white people. They have got our lands and now they are preparing to fleece us of the money accruing from the treaty. We found our plantations taken either in whole or in part by the Georgians—suits instituted against us for back rents for our own farms.... Even the Georgia laws, which deny us our oaths, are thrown aside, and notwithstanding the cries of our people... the lowest classes of the white people are flogging the Cherokees with cowhides, hickories, and clubs.²⁹

Most of the Cherokees refused to migrate. In the spring of 1838, Chief Ross again protested against the treaty by presenting Congress with a petition signed by 15,665 Cherokees. But the federal government dismissed it and ordered the military to forcibly remove them.³⁰

In command of seven thousand soldiers, General Winfield Scott warned the Cherokees: "My troops already occupy many positions... and thousands and thousands are approaching from every quarter to render assistance and escape alike hopeless. Will you, then by resistance compel us to resort to arms... or will you by flight seek to hide yourself in mountains and forests and thus oblige us to hunt you down?" The soldiers first erected internment camps and then rounded up the Cherokees. "Families at dinner were startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets in the doorway and rose up to be driven with blows and oaths along the weary miles of trail that led to the stockade. Men were seized in their fields... women were taken from their wheels and children from their play." The process

of dispossession was violent and cruel. "The Cherokees are nearly all prisoners," the Reverend Evan Jones protested. "They had been dragged from their houses... allowed no time to take any thing with them, except the clothes they had on. Well-furnished houses were left prey to plunderers, who, like hungry wolves, follow in the train of the captors.... The property of many have been taken, and sold before their eyes for almost nothing—the sellers and buyers, in many cases having combined to cheat the poor Indians."³¹

From the internment camps, the Cherokees were marched westward. "We are now about to take our final leave and kind farewell to our native land the country that the Great Spirit gave our Fathers," a Cherokee informed Chief Ross. "We are on the eve of leaving that Country that gave us birth.... It is with [sorrow] that we are forced by the authority of the white man to quit the scenes of our childhood."³²

The march took place in the dead of winter. "We are still nearly three hundred miles short of our destination," wrote Reverend Evan Jones in Little Prairie, Missouri. "It has been exceedingly cold... those thinly clad very uncomfortable... we have, since the cold set in so severely, sent on a company every morning, to make fires along the road, at short intervals.... At the Mississippi river, we were stopped from crossing, by the ice running so that boats could not pass...." The exiles were defenseless against the weather and disease. "Among the recent immigrants," wrote a witness near Little Rock, "there has been much sickness, and in some neighborhoods the mortality has been great.... Since last October about 2,000 immigrants have come. Twenty-five hundred more are on their way... much sickness and mortality among them." Quatie Ross, the wife of the chief, died of pneumonia at Little Rock. "Long time we travel on way to new land," one of the exiles recalled bitterly. "People feel bad when they leave Old Nation. Women cry and make sad wails. Children cry and many men cry, and all look sad when friends die, but they say nothing and just put heads down and keep on going towards West."³³

Removal meant separation from a special and sacred place—their homeland created by the Great Buzzard. A Cherokee song acquired new and deeper meaning from the horror of removal:

*Toward the black coffin of the upland in the
Darkening Land
your paths shall stretch out.
So shall it be for you....*

Now your soul has faded away.

It has become blue.

*When darkness comes your spirit shall
grow less and dwindle away, never to
reappear.*

A Cherokee recalled how there were so many bodies to bury: "Looks like maybe all be dead before we get to new Indian country, but always we keep marching on." By the time they reached the new land west of the Mississippi, more than four thousand Cherokees—nearly one-fourth of this exiled Indian nation—died on what they have bitterly remembered as the "Trail of Tears."³⁴

"American Progress": "Civilization" Over "Savagery"

Beyond the Mississippi River lived the Plains Indians—the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Sioux, and Pawnee. Inhabiting central Nebraska and northern Kansas, the Pawnees depended on buffalo and corn for their sustenance. Both sources of life were celebrated in Pawnee legends. When the Pawnee people were placed on the earth a long time ago, they wandered from place to place and lived on roots and berries. But food became scarce, and they suffered from hunger. Then one day, a young man looked into a cave and saw an old woman; he followed her into the cave and found another country with game and fields. "My son," she told him, "the gods have given you the buffalo. The buffalo are to run out of this cave, and the first buffalo that shall go out shall be killed by your people. Its hide must be tanned, the head must be cut off, and the skull set up on this high hill. When the meat and everything has been cut off from the skull, it must be taken to the village and put in the lodge." Next, the old woman gave the young man four bundles of corn of different colors, braided together: "These are the seeds for the people.... Now you must go and give the seeds to the people, and let them put them in the ground." With their buffalo and corn, the Pawnees were self-sufficient.³⁵

The buffalo hunt was a sacred activity, and rituals guided the Pawnees in their migrations to the hunting grounds during the summers. Before the start of the hunt, they performed a ceremony. Pantomiming the buffalo, they chanted:

*Listen, he said, yonder the buffalo are coming,
These are his sayings, yonder the buffalo are
coming,*

*They walk, they stand, they are coming,
Yonder the buffalo are coming.
Now you are going to trot
Buffalo who are killed falling.*

In another song, they described a herd of buffalo that had been sleeping on the plains. A calf, awakened by a frightening dream, warns grandfather buffalo:

*Grandfather, I had a dream.
The people are gathering to surround us.
Truly they will surprise us....
They drove you near the village,
And then the playful boys killed you.
Truly they will surprise us....³⁶*

The hunt was highly organized. When the Pawnees located the buffalo, they would form a horseshoe with the open end facing the animals. At the two points, men on foot would begin the attack, shooting the buffalo at the edge of the herd. Then men on horses would charge. "When sufficient buffalo were killed for food and other needs, the butchering began," a Pawnee told his grandson years later. "This was neither a delicate or pleasant task." Skinning the buffalo in the winter was very difficult, for the "meat and skin would begin to freeze and the blood would cake and ice on the hands." In the summer, "the flies and gnats would become unbearable and it was then the young boys would offer to wave willow branches over the carcass, and at the same time drive away the dogs that would follow the hunters from the camp...."³⁷

Strict taboos limited the buffalo kill to what the Pawnees were able to consume, thus conserving this crucial food supply. Nothing was wasted—the hides became tepees and robes, the horns spoons, the bones tools, the meat food. "The flesh, vitals, and even the intestines, all had their place in the Pawnee cuisine," reported John B. Dunbar in 1880. "The small entrails were carefully separated, freed from their contents by being pressed rapidly between the fingers, then braided together and dried with the adhering fat, forming in this condition a favorite relish. The integument of the paunch was preserved and eaten. The liver was frequently eaten raw while retaining its natural warmth, and was deemed a delicacy."³⁸

The Pawnees were also farmers. In the spring, they planted corn. They knew the time had come, for they could smell "the dif-

ferent perfumes of the white weeds." "As soon as the frost was out of the ground, these patches were cleared up and planted," reported a witness. During the ceremony to begin the planting, women pantomimed the breaking of the ground with decorative hoes made from the shoulder blades of buffalo. Songs thanking Mother Corn and celebrating the growth of the plant accompanied their motions:

*The ground now she clears....
My mother the earth comes sidewise....
Now the earth is dug into my mother....
Earth lively Mother Corn....
It is budding....
The sprouts are coming out....
The earth they are tossing it about....
Life movement.³⁹*

"The corn was hoed twice, the last time about the middle of June," a contemporary reported. "Immediately thereafter they started on the summer hunt and remained away till about the first of September, when the young corn had attained sufficient maturity for drying." In the fall, the Pawnees harvested their crops and prepared for winter.⁴⁰

During the early nineteenth century, the Pawnees began to participate in the fur trade. "The foundations of Pawnee life were undermined in the course of the fur trade, generally imperceptibly, sometimes catastrophically," observed historian David J. Wishart. "Pre-contact conceptions of nature were gradually supplanted: commercial motivations intervened and hunting was secularized; the idea of reciprocity with the environment was slowly abandoned; wildlife overkill became more feasible and common." Contact due to the fur trade also led to the introduction of new diseases like smallpox which reduced the Pawnee population from ten thousand in the 1830s to four thousand fifteen years later.⁴¹

By then, an even greater threat to the Pawnees had emerged—the railroad. In his 1831 annual message to Congress, President Andrew Jackson praised science for expanding man's power over nature by linking cities and extending trade over the mountains. The entire country had only 73 miles of railroad tracks in 1830. Ten years later, track mileage measured 3,328 miles, then stretched to 8,879 in 1850 and 30,636 in 1860—more than in all of Europe.⁴²

As tracks traversed the continent, the railroad was ushering in a new era. In 1853, a newspaper editorial welcomed the ascendancy of steam-driven transportation: "The human race very soon need not *toil*, but merely direct: hard work will be done by steam. Horses themselves are rapidly becoming obsolete. In a few years, like Indians, they will be merely traditional." Horses and also Indians would have no place in modern America. As the railroad crossed the plains and reached toward the Pacific coast, the iron horse was bringing the frontier to an end.⁴³

"What shall we do with the Indians?" asked a writer for *The Nation* in 1867, as the Irish crews of the Union Pacific and the Chinese crews of the Central Pacific raced to complete the transcontinental railroad. The "highways to the Pacific" must not be obstructed. The Indians must either be "exterminated" or subjected to the "law and habits of industry." Civilizing the Indians, he suggested, would be "the easiest and cheapest as well as the only honorable way of securing peace." This would require the integration of Indians into white society. "We need only treat Indians like men, treat them as we do ourselves, putting on them the same responsibilities, letting them sue and be sued, and taxing them as fast as they settle down and have anything to tax."⁴⁴

Two years later, in his annual message to Congress, President Ulysses S. Grant reflected on what the railroad portended for the Indians: "The building of railroads, and the access thereby given to all the agricultural and mineral regions of the country, is rapidly bringing civilized settlements into contact with all tribes of Indians. No matter what ought to be the relations between such settlements and the aborigines, the fact is they do not harmonize well, and one or the other has to give way in the end. A system which looks to the extinction of a race is too horrible for a nation to adopt without entailing upon itself the wrath of all Christendom and engendering in the citizen a disregard for human life and the rights of others, dangerous to society."⁴⁵

In 1869, the transcontinental railroad was completed, and an iron line adorned the face of America from coast to coast. Secretary of Interior J. D. Cox boasted that the railroad had "totally changed" the nature of the westward migration. Previously, settlement had taken place gradually; but the railroad had "pierced" the "very center of the desert," and every station was becoming a "nucleus for a civilized settlement." Similarly, the editor of the *Cheyenne Leader* trumpeted the train as "the advance guard of empire": "The iron horse in his resistless 'march to the sea' sur-

prises the aborigines upon their distant hunting grounds and frightens the buffalo from the plains where, for untold ages, his face has gazed in the eternal solitudes. The march of empire no longer proceeds with stately, measured strides, but has the wings of morning, and flies with the speed of lightning." As the railroad advanced to the Pacific, this mighty engine of technology was bespangling towns and cities across America, their lights glowing here and there on the horizon.⁴⁶

Behind the "resistless" railroad were powerful corporate interests, deliberately planning the settlement of the West and the extension of the market. Railroad companies saw the tribes as obstacles to track construction and actively lobbied the government to secure rights-of-way through Indian territory. They pushed for the passage of the 1871 Indian Appropriation Act, which declared that "hereafter no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power, with whom the United States may contract by treaty." Explaining the law's significance, an attorney for a railroad corporation stated: "It is not a mere prohibition of the making of future treaties with these tribes. It goes beyond this, and destroys the political existence of the tribes." Armed with the 1871 Indian Appropriation Act, railroad companies rapidly threw tracks across America and opened the West to new settlement. All of this was seen by white settlers as the advance of civilization.⁴⁷

Indians viewed the railroad very differently. They watched the iron horse transport white hunters to the plains, transforming the prairies into buffalo killing fields. They found carcasses littering and rotting along the railroad tracks, a trail of death for the buffalo—the main source of life for the Indians. Sioux chief Shako-pee predicted ecological disaster and a grim future for his people: "The great herds that once covered the prairies are no more. The white men are like locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is like a snowstorm. You may kill one, two, ten; yes, as many as the leaves in the forest yonder, and their brothers will not miss them. Count your fingers all day long and white men with guns in their hands will come faster than you can count." The decimation of the buffalo signified the end of the Pawnee way of life.⁴⁸

Along with the advance of the railroad and the increasing arrival of white settlers came a cry for Pawnee removal. "Pawnee Indians are in possession of some of the most valuable government land in the Territory," *The Nebraskan* editorialized. "The

region of the country about the junction of Salt Creek and the Platte is very attractive and there would immediately grow up a thriving settlement were it not for the Pawnees. It is the duty of Uncle Sam to remove the Pawnee population.⁵⁹

The Pawnees also found themselves under attack from the Sioux, who were moving south into their territory, also pushed by white settlers and driven by the decline of buffalo herds. Mainly a horticultural people, the Pawnees were militarily vulnerable. Women were murdered by the Sioux in the fields, earth lodges destroyed, corn crops burned, and food caches robbed. In 1873, a Pawnee hunting party was attacked by the Sioux at Massacre Canyon, and more than a hundred Pawnees were killed. Stunned by this tragedy, the Pawnees had to decide whether they should retreat to federal reservations for protection. "I do not want to leave this place," Chief Terrecowah declared. "God gave us these lands." Lone Chief echoed: "I have made up my mind to stay here on my land. I am not going where I have nothing."⁵⁰

However, most Pawnees felt they had no choice, and migrated to a reservation in Kansas. One of their songs reminded them of their home in Nebraska:

*It is there that our hearts are set,
In the expanse of the heavens.*

The very identity and existence of the Pawnees had depended on the boundlessness of their sky and earth. But now railroad tracks cut across their land like long gashes, and fences enclosed their grasslands where buffalo once roamed. Indians had become a minority on lands they had occupied for thousands of years. "If the white man had stayed on the other side of the big water," Pawnee chief Likitaweelashar sadly reflected, "we Indians would have been better off for we are neither white men nor Indians now." Another Pawnee, Overtakes the Enemy, angrily exclaimed: "To do what they [whites] called civilizing us . . . was to destroy us. You know they thought that changing us, getting rid of our old ways and language and names would make us like white men. But why should we want to be like them, cheaters and greedy? Why should we change and abandon the ways that made us men and not the beggars we became?" A Pawnee chief told a white man who tried to offer gifts of blankets, guns, and knives: "You see, my brother, that the Ruler has given us all that we need; the buffalo for food and clothing; the corn to eat with our dried meat,

or for cultivating the ground. Now go back to the country from whence you came. We do not want your presents, and we do not want you to come into our country."⁵¹

The world the Plains Indians had known was coming to an end. "The white men have surrounded me and have left me nothing but an island," protested Red Cloud. "When we first had this land we were strong. Now our nation is melting away like snow on the hillsides where the sun is warm; while the white people grow like blades of grass when summer is coming." The chief source of life and economic independence for them, the buffalo would no longer be roaming the plains. As he watched engineers surveying for a railroad in Wyoming, Red Cloud told them: "We do not want you here. You are scaring away the buffalo."⁵²

In 1873, four years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, an artist created a chromolithograph entitled *American Progress*. His painting dramatically depicted the tension between the new technology and the Indian. Twelve by sixteen inches in size, it was intended to decorate the homes of America—"from the miner's humble cabin to the stately marble mansion of the capitalist." At the center of this painting was a beautiful white woman, floating through the air and bearing on her forehead the "Star of Empire." In her right hand she carried a book, the emblem of education and knowledge, and held in her left hand telegraph wires that she was stringing across the plains. Behind her, in a clear lighted sky, were cities, factories, steamboats, and railroad trains. Three locomotives followed her. The ends of her long white gown, blowing in the wind, faded off into the tracks of the railroad, signifying the union of womanhood with technology. Beneath her, virtuous farmers plowed their fields, while pathfinders explored the "vacant lands." The course of empire was westward. Before the ethereal white woman, in a dark stormy sky, were buffalo, a bear, and Indians, in flight toward "the Stony mountains," yielding to her and the dynamic economic, cultural, and racial forces she represented. Twenty years before the presentation of Frederick Jackson Turner's paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *American Progress* was offering a panoramic self-portrait of America's triumph of "civilization" over "savagery."