A Tale of Two Tribes: A Comparative Analysis of the Removal of the Choctaw and Seminole Indians by the U.S. Government

Athena Stephanopoulos

She had written to Dr. Smith, Dr. Gwynn, clinics in Baltimore, and the federal government, but no one came to the aid of Amanda Blackwell. She was fighting an infectious battle for months that was impossible to win on her own. Her adversary was smallpox and her allies were sitting in the luxurious chairs during congressional sessions, indifferent to the face of death she saw everyday. As for Congress, its interest with those in Mississippi was of a separate concern. The process of removing the Indians, and their bodies, took longer than expected. Thus, legislatures knew the emigration deadline they debated previously would not be achieved. What was left of the Mississippi tribe that summer in 1832 still held the name "Choctaw" with pride—despite their massive loss of land and life.[1]

But only two states away in the backwoods of Florida were the Seminole people whose experience with Congress and Indian removal was hardly as passive or swift as the Choctaw's. The Seminole's trouble with the government had been brewing for decades by the time President James Madison initiated the third phase of their migration into eastern Florida territory. By the time these Amerindians moved into the wetlands, Congress had already approved Madison's plans to negotiate an incorporation of Florida territory into the Union so that no Seminoles could hold occupy the land with legitimate legal power. Once the Seminoles uncovered this covert operation, they declared intermittent war against the government, spanning from the early seventeenth century into the early 1860s.[2] Arguably this conflict with encroaching Europeans can be traced back even further to the previous hundred years when Seminole people still resided in separate, scattered tribes across the region--then fighting British slave traders before the states of America were ever united.[3]

As for the Choctaw's opposition to the government's need for their land, for the most part, their predicament transpired during their actual removal--from the 1820s to the early 1840s. The Seminole's removal commenced during the same time as the Choctaws, but unlike their relatives, the government was never fully able to relocate them West of the Mississippi.[4] With only five hundred miles separating the Choctaws from the Seminoles, it is remarkable to believe that each tribe's reaction to their removal was so different and their spirit to resist relocation was

---

[1] Choctaw Agency, 1832-8, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs,* 1824-81, microcopy No. 234, Roll 170, National Archives and Records Service (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1959), 4 October 1832, Text-fiche.

[2] James W. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Jacksonville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), 28-30; Ibid., 128-145.

[3] Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 244-247.

[4] Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1970) 38-148; Covington, 28-30, 128-145.

so opposite from one another. What contributed to these contrasting responses is a series of unique factors ranging from history, to geography, to the culture of each tribe.

In part, what led the Choctaws to their harrowing removal was a long history of political and social unrest with foreign powers, to which their peaceful nation was not accustomed. According to Choctaw mythology, these people were originally a serene, complacent band residing in the far West until two brothers, Chahta and Chikasa, determined their nation's citizens would lead more prosperous lives in a different area of North America. After employing the powers of a guide-stick, the brothers agreed that a river along south central Mississippi was the desired location. Upon arrival, the tribe engaged in various forms of agriculture to raise corn, beans, and pumpkins as well as hunting nearby animals in forests and streams for meat or fish. The homes they constructed were designed for single-family use with holes to allow smoke to escape, bed platforms and a central fireplace. In order to retain the tight-knit community they were known for, each dwelling was built immediately next to another, and over one hundred of these communities were created near various rivers in the Mississippi area before the sixteenth century.[5]

Even before the Choctaws reached the 1600s, their trouble with non-natives had begun. Spanish explorers like Hernando de Soto came to the door of the Choctaw's and hinted at overtaking their lands just in time for British eyebrows to be raised at the prospects of creating a new colony in that very region. Though the Choctaws and intermixed Chickasaws tried not to involve themselves in helping colonists find runaway slaves in exchange for material goods and food, their hope of remaining peaceful had ended when colonists began permanent settlement in the area, en masse. After adapting to the Southland, English colonists carefully devised a plan to create inter-tribal warfare between the Choctaws and Chickasaws with a specific purpose. Once engrossed in combat, colonists could capture unguarded land and cultivate it for agriculture/plantation use. One of the few attempts at thwarting these quarrels came from Frenchman Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville where he also managed to acquire Choctaw support for French causes, though the British were hardly prepared to disband Carolina holdings in the name of equality. [6]

Unfortunately for these Amerindians, the rest of the eighteenth century was filled with faulty alliances and land-hungry Europeans, most of whom were fighting amongst themselves and these Native Americans, simultaneously. As for their bond with the French, Iberville's efforts were forgotten quickly when France signed the 1763 Treaty of Paris that allocated their Mississippi lands to the British.[7] Within minutes, the people the Choctaw had been battling for a century were now their landlords. Thus far in their recorded history, the Choctaw had not raised a weapon to their adversaries unless repeatedly provoked—even by European invaders.

Despite the numerous takeovers the Choctaw experienced during the development of early America, this tribe simply chose not to succumb to the casualties European warfare produced. Likewise, before issues with colonists turned physical, the Choctaw did not actively prevent further encroachment upon their land by engaging in war, as was the case with tribes like

---

[5] W. David Baird, *The Choctaw People* (Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1973), 2-10.
[6] Ibid., 11-15.
[7] Ibid., 17-18.

the Creeks or future Seminoles. Even by the time the Choctaws grew to 20,000 and were pitted against the smaller Chickasaw nation due to English manipulation, they again chose not to engage in an easy takeover of northern territories occupied by the Chickasaws since they saw no *legitimate* need for the extra land. Many surrounding tribes needed much more space than the Choctaws to produce food for themselves because of inefficient agricultural practices. Early on, the Choctaws learned to maximize the space they were given so as not to disrupt surrounding communities or cause unnecessary scuffles. [8] Even the diaries of French explorers indicate that "the more numerous Choctaws were afraid of the Chickasaws, 'who are almost all warriors,'...and only had 'to beat drums in our cabins' to make the Choctaws run away.'"[9]

Throughout their history in America, the Choctaws were not a vicious, let alone aggressive, band of people. Conflicts with Chickasaws and unwanted participation in settlers' clashes like the American Revolution created a never ending imbroglio for the Choctaws of being pulled into assaults on their land since the day Columbus sailed the ocean blue. When others intentionally sought to take from them in some fashion, the response was usually nonviolent and submissive--as was the case with their removal from Mississippi in the 1800s.

The Seminoles, on the other hand, were not as passive. As Charles H. Fairbanks explains in his work, *The Florida Seminole People,* "the Florida Seminoles [are] are perhaps the least changed and least known of any American Indian tribe."[10] The reason for these two findings again relates to the history of its people. The latter conclusion can be reached by understanding the novelty of the Seminoles as a distinct band of people when compared to other nations. During the time of early Choctaw development, there was no Seminole tribe maturing in the foothills of Florida and in fact, the word "Seminole" was not even used to identify the tribe until the eighteenth century.[11]

Originally, those tribes which later comprised the Seminoles were scattered across the southern Georgia and Florida regions of America. Timucuas, Tocobagos, Tquestas, Apalacheees, Calusas, Creeks, and other people all assimilated into the Seminole nation after English settlers attempted to make these tribes either participate in their slave trade or annihilate them because of their resistance to succumb to European control. Even before the Seminoles were formally established, the history of each of their distinct tribes did not show obedience, let alone a pattern of nonviolent agreements with other nations. In order to escape further demise, members of these tribes haphazardly migrated into the untamed, unwanted, and unoccupied lands of Florida. When Spaniards started noticing new Indian settlements after 1750, they referred to them as "Cimrrones" or "Seminoles," to mean "Wild Ones" since they inhabited such wild, undomesticated lands.[12] Regardless of the conditions of their new home, the Seminoles were able to escape further persecution by Europeans. By the middle of the eighteenth century the

---

[8] Ibid., 11.
[9] Calloway, 216.
[10] Charles H. Fairbanks, *The Florida Seminole People* (Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1973), 1.
[11] Calloway, 246.
[12] Fairbanks, 5-8; Merqyn S. Garbarino, *Big Cypress: A Changing Seminole Community* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1972), 1.

Seminoles emerged as a loose group of decimated tribes where most members had either been killed or contracted life-threatening diseases.[13]

Arguably the demographics of the Seminoles can serve to explain the different approach they took to European advances than the Choctaws. The Choctaws have historically taken a passive role in European and American advances upon their land, which may be a primary reason for their ability to remain as one of the largest tribes to be removed successfully in the 1830s. Although their legal agreement to be walked through the snow onto unfamiliar territory was an agonizing experience, unlike the various Seminole tribes, it did keep most of them alive.[14]

The tribes creating the Seminole nation were all affected by European desires in a much more serious manner than the Choctaws. By the start of congressional debate over Indian removal, the Choctaw people remained a relatively united community since their trek to Louisiana over three hundred years prior. The Seminoles, on the contrary, came from varying areas of the American South and consisted of whatever was left of each tribe by the time colonists had settled down for plantation farming. In addition to each tribe's anger over their population's merciless slaughter from various battles, each separate nations held separate beliefs as to how to keep their remaining people alive.

Many Creeks, for example, found it best to separate from the Seminoles after banding together with them in an effort to secure their people's survival—a guarantee no Seminole pact or treaty could make. By 1790 the unaffiliated Creeks entered into an agreement with the United States to help find runaway slaves in the area and return them to their respective owners as long as the United States did not invade Creek lands nor destroy their nation. This agreement was possible because slaves had habitually traveled into the backwoods of Florida to escape plantations for hundreds of years. Since the Creeks learned these areas with the help of the Seminoles before their separation, they were able to pull out slave refugees for the Americas. Understandably, the Seminoles were angered by the Creek's cavalier attitude to sell-out this area built on refugees escaping tyrannical power. [15] Since the Seminole's own people were now allied with the United States against them, they were already preparing psychologically for vehement combat. For them, warfare was an effort to save their hidden people, release frustrations over the dictator-like democracy in which they lived, and settle the broken bonds they encountered with a tribe that sold out to save its own skin.

When conflict with Europeans and Americans did heat up for the Seminoles, there were still twenty years until Congress took direct action towards removing this tribe to the West. It was within this waiting period that the Seminoles became acquainted with shady American politics and learned not to negotiate or sign agreements with the United States in order to keep their land. After the Creek's agreement with the United States to hunt runaway slaves, the Seminoles observed the Creek's haughty willingness to then sign the Treaty of New York with America in hopes of gaining a factory to produce goods for them. The catch was that the Creeks

---

[13] Calloway, 245-247.
[14] DeRosier, Jr., 129-142.
[15] Minnie Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1920), 1-9.

were swindled into giving up twenty-five square miles of their land so that the United States could "help along" this process for them.

Within a year of this deal, the Treaty of San Lorenzo was signed. Now the United States and Spain could draw up Seminole and Creek borders, without the *unnecessary* requirement of Seminole or Creek Indians participating in the survey. It did not take long for the tribes to view government ideas with skepticism. Once the Americans failed to wholly support their treaties in the fair and stated manner all parties signed for, Seminole tempers flared. This bad deal marked the first major time Seminoles openly expressed their opposition to the government in a physical manner.

Though the Seminole negotiators appeared to have friendly relations when conversing with Americans over land, it was hardly the case for the rest of the nation. When Indians discovered that commissioner Andrew Ellicot was not going to adorn them with presents and an open door to United States opportunity as an apology for years of previous of mistreatment, the Seminoles retaliated. Ellicot's horses were all stolen from his visiting residence and the lives of him and his entourage were threatened by angry tribesmen. In response, a Seminole chief and negotiator with Ellicot, Tustenuggee Harjo, ordered the burning of revolt-members' houses and torture for those leading the disorder. The description of one man indicates that "We beat him with sticks until he was on the ground...cut his ears and a part of his cheek [and] broke all the pots, pans, and furniture in his house." In a wise decision, two hundred and fifty loyal warriors were sent to escort the commissioner for the rest of his journey, though the protection could not prevent future and more violent reaction from the Seminoles.[16]

By Thomas Jefferson's presidency it was obvious that the government wanted the lawless Seminoles off of *their* rich soil of Georgia and Northern Florida. In conjunction with Jefferson's plan to increase agricultural output on fertile lands for citizens, the President found no neighborly way to removal the Seminoles from their valued territory in a timely manner. So, as University of Oklahoma Professor Edwin C. McReynolds states, Jefferson "was willing to permit [the Indians] to drift into debt, and...saw no injustice in using the pressure of their unaccustomed financial obligations to bargain with them for their lands." [17]

The key issue for the Seminoles in the early nineteenth century came to head in a series of meetings between the Seminole and Creek's Indian agent, Efa Harjo ("Mad Dog") and Jefferson's Indian spokesman, General James Wilkinson. Since the majority of Seminoles claimed to be under Spanish rule due to the fact that Florida was still owned by Spain, the Creeks appeared before Wilkinson to negotiate Jefferson's unsettled land issues alone. Once again, the Seminoles watched the foolish agreements of their neighbors draw Jefferson one step closer to achieving his economic plan for his Union.

Just as Jefferson had instructed, Wilkinson presented the Creeks with a list of treaty violations and crimes committed by their people. The fastest and most fair means of effacing these problems, the general explained, was by ceding a large piece of there land to the United States. As a thank you for their cooperation, the tribes would receive annuity and two

---

[16] Edwin C. McReynolds, *The Seminoles* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 29-35.
[17] Ibid., 38-39.

blacksmiths—for a limited time. Mad Dog responded with a list of Indian grievances and interest in learning the white man's agricultural techniques, themselves.

In addition to signing over a chunk of their southern soil, a letter was written to the Spanish-protected Seminoles to side with the Creek decisions and accept the government's handling of their land situation. Spanish Seminoles refused, drawing a permanent division between the two intermixed tribes. But alas, ten years after Jefferson's second term the Spanish did cede Florida's territory to the United States. Now Washington D.C. required direct contact and discussion with the Seminoles, though their past experience with America rarely included affable negotiations or fair agreements with their Creek factions, let alone the ability to accept that America had the power to remove these refugees from their sanctuary in the South.[18]

While all of this commotion was taking place with the Seminoles, the Choctaws were experiencing a completely different history. The Choctaw's relationship with the Spanish was not one bent on protection from America like the Seminoles, but of strategic trade agreements. In an effort to expand their reach into American society, the Spanish set up numerous trade alliances with the Choctaws along their southern border. Realizing Spanish intentions, in 1786 the United States made additional trade alliances with the Choctaw and offered a series of benefits to which the Spanish could not propose. Now that Choctaw support was valued among influential nations, they signed onto a number of agreements by the United States that included perpetual peace, a fixed boundary line established since 1765, and, remarkably, that no American citizens could settle on Choctaw lands without their permission.[19]

The reason Spain and America valued the Choctaws to this excess was because of their vital location in the southern United States. Choctaw soil was filled with potent minerals for crops and was near some of the oldest and most critical ports of entry for international trade. There was no better position in the South, other than the Seminoles in Spanish territory, where the Americans could cultivate prosperous fruits and vegetables and export them that same day. But at this time Congress had not formally designed plans to prepare this area for immediate agricultural use or the removal of its Indian tribes, let alone nations numbering into the tensof thousands. Moreover, unlike the Seminoles, the Choctaws had not presented Spain or America countries with a history of violence, so neither of the two nations felt threatened enough by the Choctaws to take more aggressive action to quell their people than work with them in attractive trade agreements.

Unfortunately, while Choctaw relations did not deteriorate as deeply as the Seminoles, they did sign the slick treaties of American politics before they had time to realize that their sycophant of a barter-buddy was nothing more than a land-hungry, two-faced liar. Within a four-year period Congress managed to have the Choctaws sign three treaties and receive the following items: money in cash and merchandise, three sets of blacksmiths tools, and items for saddling horses and using guns. What the United States acquired in return was half of the Choctaw's entire land holdings since their arrival East of the Mississippi in the 1500s. Needless to say the trade was despotic and immoral.

---

[18] Ibid., 39-42.

[19] Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 32.

Like the Seminoles, Spain was no longer an ally for the Choctaws since America swallowed up the Louisiana Territory in 1803 which previously had bordered much of the Choctaw's land. To make matters worse, the Louisiana Territorial Act of 1804 authorized the President to "negotiate" the Indians' removal to newly acquired areas West of the Mississippi.[20] Friendly relations ended with the United States in the beginning of the nineteenth century as the Choctaw realized they were one of the closest and easiest tribes to be pushed out of Louisiana, whether they agreed to the move or not.

For the Choctaws more than the Seminoles, the government realized that presenting papers signed by their chiefs with absurd and sweeping agreements meant removal into Oklahoma land without a Choctaw revolt. Regardless of the problems associated with these treaties, the Choctaws had faith in the abilities of their chiefs, even if their decisions did not turn out favorably. By 1820 the amount of land Congress was asking from the Choctaw grew substantially larger. The Treaty of Doak's Stand written in this year was created in part by anti-Indian military leader Andrew Jackson. With the stroke of a few pens it ceded five million acres of the Choctaw's West-central Mississippi land to the government in return for bestowing them with an everlasting title to thirteen million acres near Arkansas.

Initially the Choctaws, now seasoned veterans in the world of territorial negotiations, believed they were pulling wool over the eyes of the Americans. What "Old Hickory" failed to tell the Indian chiefs is that there were *already* white settlers living in their newly-titled land—a violation of the agreement both parties had made fifteen years prior indicating that there were to be no settlers living on *any* Choctaw lands with the government's approval. Despite the headache caused by Jackson's "ephemeral" memory, guidelines were being drawn up to remove the Choctaws from the southeast United States permanently with the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.[21] Once the stipulations of the agreement were translated to Choctaw chiefs, they refused to sign. Reports later surfaced that when it was apparent that coaxing the Indians to comply was of no use, the Choctaws were forced to sign the document against their will while being threatened by American soldiers.[22]

To support the treaty's unfair conditions, the same year Dancing Rabbit was signed came the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which permitted President Andrew Jackson to transfer his hatred of Native Americans into enforceable legislation. In it, he set into law specifically that the Five Civilized Tribes, Choctaws included, were to be relocated out of their trans-appalachin lands in the name of white settlement. Although he *suggested* that this process could be

---

[20] Ibid., 33-36.

[21] Baird, 19-25; U.S. Serial Set, Number 4015, 56th Congress, 1st Session, Pages 708 and 709, 20 Jan. 1820, *Statutes At Large*, vol. 7, p. 234. American State Papers, House of Representatives, 24th Congress, 1st Session Public Lands: Volume 8, Page 563, No. 1479. On a claim for a Choctaw reservation, under the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.

[22] DeRoisier, Jr., 126; American State Papers, House of Representatives, 24th Congress, 1st Session Public Lands: Volume 8, Page 672-673, No. 1523. On claims to reservations under the fourteenth article of the treaty of dancing rabbit creek, with the Choctaw Indians; American State Papers, Senate, 24th Congress, 1st Session Public Lands: Volume 8, Page 564, No. 1480. On claims to reservations of land under the fourteenth article of the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek with the Choctaw Indians; American State Papers, Senate, 24th Congress, 1st Session Public Lands: Volume 8, Pages 498-500, No. 1449. Remonstrance of citizens of Mississippi against the manner of executing the fourteenth article of the treaty of dancing rabbit creek with the Choctaw Indians.

voluntary and pleasant, in reality it was neither. Regardless of the mild protests Choctaws enacted to keep their sacred grounds, they were no match for Jackson and his military, which had habitually fought and won Indian objections for decades.[23] These treaties symbolized how Indian policy in America was a disturbing transformation from Jefferson's aspiration to move them West to Jackson's grim policy of removing these people by force.[24] As Jackson indicated in his private papers to James Monroe, "The Indians live within the Territory of the United States...and are subject to its sovereignty and...laws. [Therefore] negotiating with them and concluding treaties, would be right and proper."[25] Perhaps it was unintentional that Jackson did not clarify for Monroe that these "negotiations and treaties" would be deliberately misleading and misunderstood by the Choctaws.

Alas, instead of object to their removal, the Choctaws again decided to accept the consequences of doing politics with foreign people and started moving to Oklahoma settlements that year. They consistently believed that bargaining at the treaty table was the most effective means of keeping their land and their people on it and sadly, every time they went to negotiate, another piece of their home was gone.

Throughout these tribulations spanning over three decades, a common theme prevailed: the government was completely uninterested in the corrupted lives of the Choctaw people, though the Choctaw's had little knowledge of this conclusion. According to American history Professor Jay Price, this lack of concern for native peoples was the norm of nineteenth century government. "Remember that this was the age when presidents still took naps in the middle of the day and the U.S. Postal System was second in size to the Department of War." More importantly, "At this time in history there was a sentiment about the American land where Indians, like the peaceful Choctaws, were the ones intruding upon *white's* property."[26]

Although the Choctaws never responded to their immediate removal with violence, some scholars believe that a passive resistance was almost as effective as the Seminole's retaliation. Delay in negotiations with the Choctaw was due to the government insisting that "revisions" be made to the Choctaw's compensation for moving to the West. Basically, revisions consisted of fewer benefits for the Choctaws in Oklahoma and a faster transfer of lands to the government so that settlement and development of the land could take place instantly.[27] But as the government was caught up in its own greed for the land, it did not realize that many Choctaws were still attempting to extract those benefits before it moved—and not physically moving to Oklahoma until 1845.

Along with this obstacle, Congress realized the err in its removal theory in that it could not relocate a nation of thousands with a few removal soldiers and their muskets. For that reason,

---

[23] DeRoisier, Jr., 26-34; Bills and Resolutions, Senate, 21st Congress, 1st Session, Mr. White, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, reported the following bill; which was read, and passed to a second reading: A Bill To provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the States or Territories, and for their removal West of the river Mississippi.

[24] DeRoisier, Jr., 126-128.

[25] Robert V. Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal, and Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) 48-49.

[26] Jay Price, Professor Of the American West and Public history, interview by author, 3 October 2005, Wichita, in person, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS.

[27] DeRosier, Jr., 128.

the Choctaws wisely engaged in more negotiations with the government to offset the cost of moving. Specifically, Congress hypothesized that an initial payment of $26.71 would entice tribesmen enough to leave the land and $20 a month for up to one year, after they departed, would keep them away from their ancient lands indefinitely. [28] While the Choctaw's persistence with negotiation did not return them their land, it did force the government to take more interest in Indian affairs since the Choctaw's removal was one of the first in the 1800s. Attention was raised to improve Native American relocation as well because a removal treaty with the Choctaws, biased on the side of the Americans, was costing them exorbenent amounts of money. Therefore, Congress began to understand, briefly, that presenting more fair agreements would end up saving them the money they lost in the unhurried relocation process. Had the Choctaws finished their removal on time, Indian expenses for the 1833-1834 year probably would have been about $8,000. But because they did not plan to finish moving anytime soon nor promote the relocation of other, smaller tribes, expenses for the upcoming year were now estimated to be more than $150,000—and counting...[29]

As for the Seminoles, their reply to Indian removal was simple: war. The Seminoles did not favor long, drawn out negotiations with a corrupt state in part because they were an assimilation of different cultures with different views as to which territories should be ceded, for what price, and why they were permissible to sell in the first place. Even their ability to communicate with one another was hindered due to the varying tongues each former tribe took with them to the Seminole region. Many Creek refugees, for instance, spoke a foreign Muskogean tongue instead of the traditional Mikasuki of the Seminoles.[30] Furthermore, the Seminoles were created as a band of people removed from their original tribes and lands. So the thought of removal once more was interpreted as a threat to destroy their already limited population and build over the cultures they fought so ardently to preserve. The Choctaws never experienced a past as checkered as the Seminoles, so their amicability with treaty negotiations was based on a totally separate history and experience with Europeans and Americans.

Despite the numerous skirmishes between the Seminoles and foreign powers, the Seminoles were not partial to offensive combat provoked by their own tribe. In fact, their nation was created out of a bank of exiles from the South as discussed previously. One of these tribes, the Creeks, foolishly signed an agreement with the government to permit pioneers to pass through their lands into other counties. When the pioneers decided to settle in Creek lands, the

---

[28] U.S. Congress, House, Office of Indian Affairs, Agent F. W. Armstrong speaking on the state of affairs in the Choctaw Nation, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 107, (21 January 1845), micro card, 3.

[29] Office of Indian Affairs, *Commissioners' Report of the Indian Bureau* (Washington, D.C.: GOP, 1832), micro card 171; Bills and Resolutions, Senate, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Mr. Bell, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, reported the following joint resolution: which was read, and passed to a second reading. Joint Resolution For the relief of the attorneys employed by the Choctaw reservees under the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, concluded on 15 Sept. 1830; Bills and Resolutions, Senate, 27th Congress, 1st Session, Mr. Morehead, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, reported the following bill; which was read, and passed to a second reading. A Bill To provide for the satisfaction of the outstanding Choctaw reservations, under the nineteenth article of the treaty of Dancing-rabbit creek, Sept. 1830.

[30] Fairbanks, 16; American State Papers, House of Representatives, 24th Congress, 1st Session
Public Lands: Volume 8, Pages 557-559, No. 1475. Application of Florida for a grant of land to the East Florida railroad company.~No. 1476. On a claim to a Choctaw reservation under the Fourteenth Article of the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.

Creek War of 1814 ensued. Many of the tribesmen fled to Florida to be absorbed by the Seminoles when Andrew Jackson demolished Creek holdings in the area.[31]

Though the Seminoles took a stab at treaty relations in the late 1810s-early 1820s, their bargaining was not prosperous. In the middle of the eighteenth century, American and English tensions heated into a revolution, where unoccupied wilderness, like the lands of Florida, were key areas for conflict. Spain was able to protect them from many battles during this time, but at the beginning of the 1800s, Spanish holdings in the South decayed due to their own economic problems at home. Thus, the Seminole's were left to defend their lands alone. Seeing the unprotected and unaffiliated Indians of Florida as vulnerable targets, Andrew Jackson marched in to takeover Seminole villages on the borderline to the Union. The war was considered somewhat of a wash except for its ability to focus American eyes squarely on the value Florida territory would add to the union. The exploration Jackson's men conducted made their fight for it with the Spanish and Seminoles that much more worth while. In 1819 the Treaty of Adams-Onis transferred Florida to the United States without the permission of the Seminoles, or notification to them that their land was being taken over by their enemies.[32]

By 1820, not only had their protectors, the Spanish, betrayed them, but the Seminoles were now caught in the predicament of trying to retain any land they previously possessed that was now wholly in the hands of the Americans. Grudgingly the Seminole's Chief Neamathla convinced his people to accept a reservation the Americans built for them that was still on a portion of their land. Essentially the Treaty of Moultrie Creek bestowed to the Seminoles money and tools to use on their new reservation in return for a complete session of their lands.

But in the spirit of the Seminole people, the move to a new area, though not West of the Mississippi, was taxing on all parties involved. First, by the time the treaty was signed in 1823, the Seminoles were still a widely scattered bunch in Florida. So congregating them into a small patch of land by St. Augustine was next to impossible, especially when trying to communicate the American's intentions in a foreign and often misinterpreted tongue. Another problem was the Seminole's historic division between leaders in the tribe—many of whom found Neamathla nothing more than a outcast tribesman who spoke for only a small group of individuals.[33] In contrast, much of the Choctaw's negotiations with the government went through Principle Chief Mushulatubbee—a man to whom everyone agreed had the Indians' best interests at heart and had the most inherent knowledge of tribal business based on his bloodline of previous rulers.[34] Since the Seminoles never resolved their leadership issues, the ease of their removal was not practical.

Beyond their lack of knowledge with American agricultural techniques, when Neamathla agreed to move their people to the reservation, he failed to realize that this move did not include runaway slaves, no matter how ingrained they were in the Seminole culture. The act of returning slaves to the government was a serious loss for the disintegrating Seminole tribe.[35] The final straw for the nation came in 1832 with the Payne's Landing Treaty that formally removed all

---

[31] Fairbanks, 16-17.
[32] Ibid., 18-26.
[33] Brent Richards Weisman, *Unconquered People: Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Indians* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999), 44-47.
[34] DeRoisier, Jr., 79-80.
[35] Weisman, 46-47.

Florida land holdings from them and, like the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, set up instructions for formal Seminole removal. When another chief, Osceola, discovered these problems and found that the Seminole only had until 1836 to be moved, they sharpened their weapons and engaged in the Second Seminole War. Hearing of the rapidness the Choctaw crosses the Mississippi with, Osceola's followers refused to pack up their belongings and follow in a procession of Indians to the West, as if they were wards of a government that viewed them as chess pieces on the map of America. Combat lingered on until 1842 and cost the United States up to forty million dollars. The war ended as a stalemate for both parties and won many Seminoles the right to stay in their Florida lands to present day.[36]

In essence, the Seminole's encounter with Indian Removal was the product of their inability to agree upon discussion with the Americans, based on the varying views of dissimilar tribesmen and a fervent frustration towards foreign nations that desired to swallow up their refugee lands in the name of political gain. Conversely, the Choctaw's swift departure into reserved western lands was the outcome of a peaceful nation's corollary stating that preserving their culture and keeping their community unified, wherever that may be, was more important than participating in a few unscrupulous, deadly wars for the sake of owning a pile of dirt that was not even theirs a few hundred years before. It is without question that since the Choctaw nation was one of the first to be removed, their compliance affected government relations with the removal of future tribes. For the Seminoles, resistance to relocate resulted not with fair treaties or kinder words, but with war.

Thus, the die was cast for both tribes. White settlers increased on each nation's land regardless of the measures they took—war, living on a reservation, or resigning to a life in the swamplands. As Native American Specialist, Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., laments, the Seminole and Choctaw Nations "would be proud and powerful no more, except in their hearts." [37]

---

[36] Fairbanks, 23-30; Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, 1789-1873 Tuesday, April 30, 1850, p. 313-316.

[37] DeRosier, Jr., 167.