

Removal of American Indian Tribes

Remember
Remember the sacredness of things,
Running streams and dwellings,
The young within the nest,
A hearth for sacred fire,
The Holy Flame... —Pawnee Morning Ceremony

The United States government's campaign in the 1830s to move tribes from various aboriginal territories to "Indian Territory" (Oklahoma and parts of Kansas) remains one of the darkest chapters in American history. The removal period exemplifies two government branches' very different ideas about Indian policy. While the Supreme Court was establishing the cornerstones for tribal sovereignty, government-to-government relationship, and trust responsibility, Congress was passing laws to force tribes to relocate and to give up certain sovereign powers. The general attitude of the government and the population at that time was influenced by the concept of "manifest destiny," a tenet holding that territorial expansion of the United States was not only inevitable, but also divinely ordained.

By the 1800s, the rapid growth of white settlement in the United States had created a demand for territorial expansion. This led to the policy of extinguishing tribal titles to land and removing certain tribes to western territories. Through the 1830s, Indian treaties were used to make vast areas available and to reduce the conflict between sovereign authorities caused by the presence of independent Indian governments within state boundaries. President Andrew Jackson increased the use of the military to force what had begun as voluntary relocation of Indians to the west. In 1830, after heated debate, the Congress passed the Indian Removal Act authorizing the president to exchange lands west of the Mississippi River for tribal lands within any state or territory and to "remove and relocate" the Indians accordingly. This authorized the use of force to remove Indians to Indian Territory or reservations.

Although it began as a joint civilian-military effort, relocation tasks were eventually turned over to the Army in order to lower costs. The Army, and sometimes state militias, relocated more than 60 tribes, most from the southeast and north central United States.

Thousands died on forced marches; some tribes were almost completely annihilated by the harsh conditions experienced during their removal. Forced marches continued into the later part of the 19th century. The removal policy had a dramatic impact on the southern Indian nations, known as the "Five Civilized Tribes," which consisted of the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles. The following timeline provides just a few examples of what was happening across the country:

- 1832 - Hundreds of Creek Indians were removed by the military to Indian Territory.
- 1834 - The Seminole Indians were ordered to leave Florida and to move west of the Mississippi River.
- 1838 - Army General John Wool requested reassignment in protest over the order that he begin the forced removal of 14,000 Cherokees from Georgia. Wool was replaced by

General W. Scott, who arrived in Georgia with 7,000 men. More than 4,000 Cherokees died during the “relocation” to what is now Oklahoma, on what has now become known as the “Trail of Tears.”

- 1835 - The Caddo Confederacy of Louisiana-Texas area ceded all of its land in the Louisiana area and agreed to move to the Brazos Reserve in central-west Texas, where several other displaced tribes (Comanche, Kiowa, Wichita) were also living.
- 1859 - The Caddo were removed again, under threat of annihilation from Texas citizens, to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. In the end, only 500 Caddo men, women, and children arrive in Oklahoma.
- 1873 - Approximately 120 Modoc Indians, led by Captain Jack, held out in California lava beds against more than 1,000 U.S. troops. They were finally dislodged by artillery bombardment, and Captain Jack and two other leaders were hanged. The remaining Modoc were forcibly removed to Indian Territory in Oklahoma.
- 1878 - Bannock, Paiute, and other Indians of southern Idaho, starving and dispirited, left their reservations in an attempt to reestablish their traditional way of life. They were captured and subdued by the 21st Infantry, 4th Artillery and 1st Cavalry by September 1879.
- 1886 - Geronimo and his band of 24 Chiricahua Apaches were hunted by General Nelson Miles and 5,000 soldiers. After Geronimo's surrender, he and all Chiricahua Apaches, including those who assisted the Army as scouts, were sent as prisoners to Fort Marion, Florida.
- 1894 - Geronimo and the surviving Chiricahua Apache prisoners of war were transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.
- 1897 - By agreement with the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache, some 27,000 acres of Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache reservations were added to the Fort Sill Military Reservation. These lands were to be used exclusively for military purposes and for the permanent location of Apache prisoners of war.

The stories of the various tribes' fight for their aboriginal territory and their subsequent removal are diverse. However, many of the removal stories had the same ending: removal to Oklahoma. Historically, only five tribes are considered indigenous to Oklahoma: Caddo, Kiowa, Wichita, Comanche, and Osage. Oklahoma is now home to 39 tribal governments, with a population of more than 254,000 tribal members. All other tribes that have come to reside in this region were removed from their ancestral homelands to Oklahoma during the removal period. Although the forced migration of the Cherokee has come to symbolize the brutality of Indian removal, other tribes experienced their own "trail of tears".

It is important to recognize that although American Indian tribes may now be absent from a particular area or state, it is very likely that at least one tribe, and often several tribes, made the area their home for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Sacred sites, traditional cultural properties, and natural and cultural resources, which could be of great importance to a tribe and are legally protected, may be found in areas not currently part of a tribe's reserved lands. Therefore, it is important that installation and DoD personnel not assume that because no tribes currently inhabit the property there will be no relevant Indian concerns and interests associated

with the area. Research the history of the area, including the archaeology. This information may help you determine what tribes may have concerns with activities taking place in the area or with other issues, such as those associated with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. Once this information has been obtained, DoD or the installation can determine whether the tribe or tribes affected are federally recognized, where they are currently located, and how consultation should proceed.

Removal and its horrendous, long-lasting effects are best summed up in the words of Grant Foreman who devoted his life to recording the history of Oklahoma and its tribes:

... this tragic phase of American history is best understood if one will remember that for the most part the southern Indians were people of fixed habits and tastes. They were not nomads like some western Indians; they were less inclined to wander to strange places than white people. They loved their streams and valleys, their hills, and forests, their fields and herds, their homes and firesides, families and friends; they were rooted in the soil as the Choctaw Chief Pushmataha said, "where we have grown up as the herbs of the woods." More than white people they cherished a passionate attachment for the earth that held the bones of their ancestors and relatives. Few white people either understood or respected this sentiment. The trees that shaded their homes, the cooling spring that ministered to every family, friendly watercourses, familiar trails and prospects, husk grounds, and council houses were their property and their friends; these simple possessions filled their lives; their loss was cataclysmic. It is doubtful if white people with their readier adaptability can understand the sense of grief and desolation that overwhelmed the Indian when they were compelled to leave all these behind forever and begin the long, sad journey towards the setting sun which they called the Trail of Tears.

Grant Foreman
Indian Removal

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