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THE EXPANSION OF EUROPEAN COLONIZATION TO THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY, 1780-1880

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For Eastern Indians and the United States both, the century from 1780 to 1880 was a period of experimentation, learning, adjusting, and ultimately, struggling for dominance over the land and its resources. During that century, Native Americans experienced steady decline in population and power. While they won important victories through warfare, politics, and judicial action, in the end they lost all but tiny remnants of their lands east of the Mississippi. Required to relocate west of the river in Indian Territory, their numbers continued to decline even as they attempted, often quite successfully, to build new lives and communities in unfamiliar country. But the combined effects of the American Civil War and the economic penetration of corporate America brought a second round of defeats so that by 1880 the nations of Indian Territory, like those scattered groups that had avoided removal and remained in the East, were surrounded and in imminent danger of dispossession and fragmentation.

The Indian policy of the United States government during its first century was not designed to exterminate Native Americans, but it was created to meet the needs and wishes, economic, political, and spiritual, of its citizens. Those needs and wishes rarely coincided with the interests of Native Americans and, when in conflict, Indians, often denigrated as culturally and racially inferior, found themselves overwhelmed by the superior power of federal and state governments. Humanitarian interests in the United States decried the suffering of Native people and struggled to alleviate it, but the methods and goals of the well-meaning required a cultural transformation so complete that most Indians rejected it. Rather, Native people and groups sought to find their own answers to the questions they faced. The range of their solutions reflected a degree of imagination, inventiveness, and adaptation that scholars have only recently begun to understand. But the characteristic that clearly unites this history is the

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who were required by the Treaty of Washington to vacate their lands claimed by Georgia, went as well. Believing that a trickle of voluntary migrants weakened the nation and its resolve to resist removal, the Council enacted laws and appointed police to keep the people at home. But over the winter of 1831-2, as the level of Alabama harassment increased and as the Jackson Administration continued its policy of refusing to enforce the protective provisions of the treaties, the Council caved in.

Under the guidance of Opothle Yoholo, de facto leader of the Creek Nation, the Council came up with a measure that might have met the interests of all the Creeks. Adopting the allotment concept written into the Chickasaw and Choctaw treaties, the Creek plan called for reserves to be allocated to every person. They were to be clustered, however, to perpetuate the towns. Creeks who wished to sell their allotments and move west could do so, but those who wished to remain in their homeland could preserve their town-based communal culture by contributing their allotments to the cluster that would represent their town. After the nation was surveyed, unallotted land would be available for sale to Alabamians. Acting on the assumption that the state of Alabama would never permit the scheme to work, the federal government accepted the Creeks' proposal and in March 1832 wrote it into a treaty.

Lewis Cass, newly appointed Secretary of War in Jackson's cabinet, had assumed correctly. Alabamians with and without state authorization descended on the Creeks. Land grabbers evicted them from their allotments, swindlers took them to court on fake charges, and grave robbers stole jewelry off the dead and buried. The Alabama legislature made hunting by Indians illegal, Creek women could not plant and harvest their crops in peace, and the people starved. In 1836, after four years of this, groups of young men struck out. The "Creek War" was hardly more than a few colorful but scattered incidents - a handful of warriors attacked and burned to the water line a steamboat on the Chattahoochee - but it was enough to provide Jackson, in a sharply contested election year, with an excuse to send troops. Claiming that the Creeks might make common cause with the Seminoles, the Army simply rounded them up and marched them off. Forced to abandon their allotments, improvements, and much of their movable property, the impoverished Creeks reached their new homes in the midst of one of the coldest, iciest, and snowiest winters on record.

The Seminoles, the next group to sign a removal treaty, were a nation of migrants and refugees. Attracted by fertile land, good hunting, and Spanish inducements, groups and towns of Lower Creeks began to move to