
When I was a boy, I saw the white man afar off, and was told he was my enemy. I could not shoot him as I would a wolf or a bear, yet he came upon me.

My horse and fields he took from me. He said he was my friend—he gave me his hand in friendship. I took it, he had a snake in the other, his tongue was forked. I am about to leave Florida forever and have done nothing to disgrace it. It was my home; I loved it, and to leave is like burying my wife and child.

—COACOOCHEE
(Seminole), 1858

could not act to enforce the ruling until a state judge formally refused to comply, and in this case the state just ignored the Supreme Court, which adjourned without ever reporting to the president Georgia's failure to conform. As a result, the decision had no practical effect.

This left the Cherokees and the other southern tribes at the mercy of the states. Alabama and Mississippi imitated Georgia in extending their laws over the Indian nations, and North Carolina and Tennessee followed. For the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, and Creeks the result was disaster. From self-governing peoples living on their own lands, Indians became people pauperized by the government with no right to protect their lives or property. Tuskeneah, a headman of the Creek town of Cusseta, reported white marauders spoiling his lands and "taking possession of the Red peoples improvements that they have made with their own labor." Although whites stole Indian property, American troops refused to intervene. But when the Yuchis, "a small part of our Tribe," killed American livestock, the whites hunted them down "and shot them as though they were deer."

The federal government held out removal as the only realistic hope for renewed security and sovereignty, and in desperation and anguish southern Indians were left to "choose." The large majority of Indians in the south had no desire to remove, but after 1832 they had no effective way to resist. In each nation there came to be those who saw removal as inevitable. Some viewed it as a way of escaping whites; some saw personal or factional gain in cooperation; some simply resigned themselves to obtaining the best price they could. And beginning with the Choctaws at Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, federal negotiators, employing various degrees of coercion and fraud, obtained their removal treaties. The most blatantly fraudulent of all was the New Echota Treaty of 1835 with the Cherokees. Negotiated with the Ridge group, who represented only a small fraction of the nation, it was, as the Cherokee national council said, "a fraud upon the Cherokee people." The U.S. Senate ratified it by a single vote.

As an immediate aftermath of the removal treaties, abuse markedly increased. Although many of the treaties promised that Indians wishing to remain could obtain land allotments, white squatters invaded the nations, seizing land and improvements. Indians found themselves being stripped of property, including their homes, fields, livestock, and goods. Because no court could accept the testimony of an Indian against a white man, squatters could lodge fraudulent claims uncontested. Whiskey sellers appeared in droves. They advanced credit, which became debt, which then provided a spurious excuse for claiming the Indian land allotments supposedly protected under the treaties.

Fraud, violence, and drunkenness were the immediate fruits of the treaties. For Indians, chaos would be the ultimate result, with uprooted, homeless, displaced thousands trailing slowly west. Resistance was futile. When, in desperation, some Creeks, led by Eneah Emathla, an elder, retaliated for an attack by Georgia militia by killing whites and destroying their property, federal troops at once stepped in and, together with the Alabama militia, subdued them in the "Creek War" of 1836. The "hostiles" were rounded up, manacled, and chained together (including the eighty-four-year-old Emathla) and marched west. The state of Georgia gained twenty-five million acres of Creek land.