

OKLAHOMA: A RESETTLEMENT AREA FOR INDIANS

By Duane Gage

When Europeans first arrived in America the area of present Oklahoma was sparsely inhabited by bands of semi-sedentary Athapascan, Caddo, and Wichita Indians. Ultimately Indians from sixty-seven tribes found homes in the Sooner State.¹ Specifically why did Oklahoma become the home for this great number of tribes? A combination of factors, including national politics, misleading geographic reports, racial prejudice, land greed, accessibility, and the presence of fierce plains tribes, affected Oklahoma's destiny.

Throughout the colonial period in American history white settlers appropriated eastern Indian lands, and, although the line of permanent white settlement during colonial times hardly reached beyond any point west of the Mississippi River, western tribes were already feeling the impact of white civilization. The introduction of firearms into certain eastern Algonquin tribes by French fur traders in the seventeenth century resulted in the westward migration of less powerful groups. For example, the Cheyenne tribe originally lived in Minnesota, but were pushed into western South Dakota by the Assiniboine Sioux, who were themselves fleeing from the Chippewa, then already in possession of guns.² The Cheyenne in turn displaced the Kiowa, who migrated south and gained control of the upper Red River area, including most of western Oklahoma.³

The acquisition of horses from Spanish settlements in New Spain also influenced tribal migrations. For example, the Comanche tribe, driven from southern Wyoming by the Sioux, secured horses and moved into the southwestern plains to hunt buffalo. The Comanche pushed aside weaker tribes with whom they came in contact, and, about 1795, after many years of fighting the Kiowa—who had also acquired horses—the two tribes reached a peace agreement.⁴ The Kiowa and Comanche remained in and near western Oklahoma primarily because it was the most attractive buffalo-hunting area left available to them. Once there they constituted a barrier to early occupation

¹ Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman: 1951), p. ix.

² Frederick Webb Hodge, editor, "Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico," *Bulletin 40*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, 2 vols. (New York: 1907), Vol. I, p. 251.

³ Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.

⁴ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

of the southwest by both whites and migrating tribes from the east.

Eastern Oklahoma likewise was an attractive hunting ground for bands of Choctaw, Cherokee, and other southeastern tribes who made periodic excursions west of the Mississippi River.⁵ In 1721 a French expedition found eastern Oklahoma to be "a very beautiful country, fertile plains, vast prairies covered with buffalo, stags, does, deer, turtles, etc."⁶ In 1802, rivalry between French and Spanish trading interests in the valleys of the Missouri River and its tributaries prompted a large part of the Osage Indians to move their permanent villages from Missouri into more lucrative hunting lands in northeastern Oklahoma.⁷ At the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Osage claimed all of Oklahoma north of the Canadian River as tribal hunting grounds. Thus the migration of nonindigenous tribes to Oklahoma before it became part of the United States can be explained in terms of the area attracting them because of its abundance of game.

In 1803, when the Jefferson administration negotiated with France for Louisiana, President Jefferson's main objective was to secure United States control of the Mississippi River. When his ministers returned home with a treaty purchasing all of the vague, vast area between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains—including Oklahoma—Jefferson set about to validate the purchase. In July, 1803, he drafted a proposed constitutional amendment which, had it been adopted, would have confirmed "the right of occupancy in the soil, and of self-government" to the Indian inhabitants therein. The same amendment would have authorized the federal legislature to remove Indians east of the Mississippi by exchanging their lands for unoccupied lands in the upper Louisiana Territory.⁸ Jefferson's advocacy of Indian removal reflected the obligation put upon his administration by the Georgia Compact of 1802, an agreement in which the state of Georgia ceded her claim to western lands in exchange for a payment of \$1,250,000 and a promise that the United States would extinguish the Indian title to all lands within Georgia "as early as the same can be peaceably obtained." In order to secure a land settlement with Georgia, which wanted no Indians within its borders, the United States thus acquired an

⁵ Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 60, p. 106.

⁶ M. Batol-Dumont, "Historical Memoirs of Louisiana," *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, translated by Benjamin Franklin French, 5 vols. (New York: 1853), Vol. V, p. 36.

⁷ Donald Jackson, editor, *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, 2 vols. (Norman: 1960), Vol. II, p. 32.

⁸ Paul Leicester Ford, editor, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 10 vols. (New York: 1822), Vol. VIII, pp. 241-249.

official policy of transplanting Indians into the west.⁹

The congressional debates on the Louisiana Treaty included comments on the merits of the removal policy. Administration critics argued that the suggestion to remove Indians from the eastern to the western banks of the Mississippi was "impracticable . . . The inducements will be so strong that it will be impossible to restrain our citizens from crossing the river."¹⁰ Congressional supporters of the administration, on the other hand, argued that the acquisition of the country west of the Mississippi would remove the cause of Indian wars; the southern tribes, "now hemmed in on every side, . . . want a wider field for the chase, and Louisiana presents it."¹¹

Apparently Congress did not discuss specifically where in unexplored Louisiana the southern tribes should be resettled. Knowledge of the region was confined largely to travelers' observations of the land along the Mississippi. Jefferson himself seems to have had the impression that the newly acquired territory was "not inferior to the old" in soil, climate, and productive capability.¹² Yet he admitted that "our information as to the country is very incomplete."¹³ Even before the Louisiana Purchase was ratified, the President sent his private secretary, Meriwether Lewis, to lead an expedition from St. Louis to the headwaters of the Missouri River, then on to the Pacific. Jefferson instructed Lewis to "inquire into the nature of the country and the nations inhabiting it."¹⁴ In the summer of 1804, Jefferson sent William Dunbar of Natchez, a practical scientist of some note, on a similar exploration of the Red River to its source. Unfortunately the Dunbar expedition was threatened by Spaniards in Texas, and did not leave present-day Louisiana. Nevertheless, Dunbar gathered reports from well-traveled Indian traders, and described the western prairies:¹⁵

⁹ "Public Lands," *American State Papers*, 38 vols. (Washington: 1832), Vol. XXVIII, pp. 125-126.

¹⁰ *Annals of Congress*, 6th Congress, 1st Session, 1803-1804, pp. 33-34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 440.

¹² Thomas Jefferson to General Gates, letter dated July 11, 1803, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, edited by H. A. Washington, 9 vols. (Washington: 1864), Vol. IV, p. 494.

¹³ Thomas Jefferson to John Breckenridge, letter dated August 12, 1803, *Ibid.*, p. 498.

¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson to Captain Meriwether Lewis, letter dated January 22, 1804, *Ibid.*, p. 522.

¹⁵ William Dunbar, "The Exploration of the Red, the Black, and the Washita Rivers," *Documents Relating to the Exploration of Louisiana* (Boston: 1804), pp. 159-160.

The whole of these prairies is represented to be composed of the richest and most fertile soil . . . Should it be found that of this rich and desirable country there are 500 miles square, and from report, there is probably much more, the whole of it being cultivable, it will admit of the fullest population, and will at a future day vie with the best cultivated & most populous countries on the globe.

Had Dunbar's ebullient report been given wide circulation it perhaps would have stemmed the rising tide of eastern opinion that the western plains were suitable only for Indians. In September, 1806, Lewis returned from his expedition reporting that the northern plains contained numerous dry stream beds; the soil was of little value because of the lack of water. Later, in 1806, Zebulon Montgomery Pike, a young army officer, explored the southwestern plains between the Arkansas and Red rivers. Pike's account, which Americans read with keen interest when it was published in 1810, told of the barren, parched soil of the western plains: "These vast plains . . . may become in time equally celebrated as the sandy deserts [*sic*] of Africa; for I saw in my route, in various places, tracts of many leagues, where the wind had thrown up the sand, . . . and on which not a speck of vegetable matter existed."¹⁶

Pike suggested that the western plains should be left to "the wandering and uncivilized aborigines of the country." Henry Marie Brackenridge, a young attorney traveling with a group of fur traders in 1811, likewise reported that the western regions of Louisiana were not suitable for cultivation. Published in 1814, Brackenridge's journal strengthened the growing notion that the western plains was a Great American Desert. "The natives will probably remain in quiet and undisturbed possession, for at least a century," he predicted.¹⁷

Brackenridge's prediction was, of course, inaccurate, for already the federal government had taken steps to prepare Louisiana for white settlement. An act of Congress on March 26, 1804, separated the area of present-day Louisiana from the rest of the purchased territory, established territorial governments for the two areas, and authorized the President to make treaties removing eastern tribes to lands west of the Mississippi.¹⁸ Meanwhile, some voluntary Indian migration already had occurred, for on November 14, 1803, President Jefferson informed Congress that "a scarcity of game on the eastern side of the Mississippi has lately induced a number of Cherokees, Choctaws, Chick-

¹⁶ Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷ Henry Marie Brackenridge, "Journal of a Voyage Up the River Missouri," *Early Western Travels, 1748-1840*, edited by Benben Gold Thwaites, 32 vols. (Cleveland: 1904), Vol. VI, pp. 100-101.

¹⁸ *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 8th Congress, 1st Session, 1803-1804, Vol. II, pp. 283-289.

saaws, &c., to frequent the neighborhood of Arkansas, where game is still in abundance; they . . . seem inclined to make a permanent settlement."¹⁹

On March 7, 1805, Jefferson suggested to a delegation of Chickasaw Indians that they consider trading their Mississippi lands for unoccupied lands in Louisiana.²⁰ A few months later he likewise suggested to chiefs of the Cherokee nation that they encourage their young men, who had been crossing the Mississippi to make war, to go and live peaceably with Cherokee who already had settled there.²¹ In 1808 the federal government, capitalizing on a factional dispute within the Ojage nation, persuaded leaders in that tribe to cede their lands in northern Arkansas to the government because the land was needed for "white hunters" and friendly Indians.²² Although no definite tract of territory was assigned to them, in 1809 "large parties" of Cherokee settled on the most accessible lands along the Arkansas and White Rivers.²³ Jefferson cautioned them that the higher up the rivers they settled, the better, since white settlements "will begin at the mouths of those rivers."²⁴

Jefferson's statement indicated that no well-formulated policy concerning Indian removal existed, and that inevitably Arkansas would be populated by white settlers. By 1810, there were 1,062 white citizens residing in Arkansas, and already the Indian immigrants were caught in a vise between white civilization and the fierce tribes of the plains.²⁵ At that time, territory in Arkansas was considered still a part of the vast Louisiana Territory.

Northern portions of Louisiana Territory also received groups of migrating Indians during Jefferson's administration.

¹⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 8th Congress, 2nd Session, 1804-1806, pp. 1811-1812.

²⁰ Thomas Jefferson to the Chiefs of the Chickasaw Nation, letter dated March 7, 1805, in *The Complete Jefferson: Containing His Major Writings, Published and Unpublished*, compiled by Saul K. Padover (New York: 1943), p. 472.

²¹ Thomas Jefferson to the Chiefs of the Cherokee Nation, letter dated January 10, 1806, *ibid.*, p. 479.

²² "Indian Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. VII, pp. 765-766; Charles J. Kappler, editor, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 5 vols. (Washington: 1904), Vol. II, pp. 85-89.

²³ Alexander J. Dallas to Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs, November 1, 1806, Letters sent by the Secretary of War, *Indian Office Record Books*, National Archives.

²⁴ Thomas Jefferson to the Deputies of the Cherokees of the Upper and Lower Towns, letter dated January 8, 1809, Padover, *op. cit.*, pp. 506-507.

²⁵ *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1857*, U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (Washington: 1906), p. 13.

Beginning in 1803, William Henry Harrison, territorial governor of Indiana, negotiated a series of treaties with the Shawnee, Delaware, Kickapoo, and other northern tribes, removing them westward in advance of the line of white settlement. In most instances the resettlement area for the displaced tribes was simply the most accessible unoccupied area directly to the west, although several roving bands of Shawnee and Delaware voluntarily migrated into the southwest as far as the Red River.²⁶ These early Shawnee and Delaware immigrants established scattered settlements and carried on trade up to the time of the "Civil War," with the plains tribes of western Oklahoma who rarely ventured east beyond the Cross Timbers, a thick forest of blackjack and post oak which divided the timbered areas of eastern Oklahoma and the western plains. In general, the removal program was poorly co-ordinated; tribal territorial claims in the northwest were difficult to determine; and white families often squatted on treaty-assigned Indian lands before the tribes could complete their removal.²⁷

In President James Madison's administration, during which many of the tribes fought against the United States in the War of 1812, the government's interest in Indian removal steadily declined. Madison preferred a gradual migration of small groups of Indians while the federal government acquired Indian territory through humanitarian means.²⁸ Meanwhile, white migration into Louisiana Territory continued and the Federal government took steps to assure organized government for the settlers. In 1812, when the state of Louisiana entered the Union, the remainder of Louisiana Territory was reorganized as Missouri Territory.²⁹

In 1819, preparatory to Missouri statehood, Arkansas Territory was created to include not only present Arkansas but also the land south of the line 36°30' north latitude and west to

²⁶ "Indian Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. VII, pp. 988-704; pp. 761-702; Grant Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians* (Chicago: 1946), p. 34; Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 159, p. 242.

²⁷ Annie Heloise Abel, "The History of Events Resulting in Indian Consolidation West of the Mississippi," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1900, Vol. I, pp. 256-267; (Old Shawneetown is a community about 3 miles southwest of Isabel in McCurtain County, settled by Shawnee Indians around 1808. Their plowed fields, fences, and log houses were purchased by the noted Choctaw, Robert M. Jones, in the 1830's, and operated as a large plantation here for many years before the Civil War.—Ed.)

²⁸ The Secretary of War to Elias Dismore, letter dated April 20, 1811, in "The Territory of Mississippi, 1800-1817," Vol. VI of *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, edited by Clarence Edwin Carter (Washington: 1937), pp. 101-102.

²⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 12th Congress, 1st Session, 1812, p. 2910.

100° west longitude, the international boundary between the United States and Spanish territory. Congressional debates on the Arkansas territorial bill reflected the general lack of knowledge concerning the different kinds of population in the territory and the location and condition of existing settlements.¹⁰ The following year an expedition led by Major Stephen H. Long, of the United States Corps of Topographical Engineers, set out to explore the Red River from its upper sources. Long, who mistook the Canadian River for the Red, reported that the trans-Mississippi country was almost wholly unfit for cultivation. "The want of timber, of navigable streams, and of water for the necessities of life, render it an unfit residence for any but a nomad population," declared Edwin James, botanist and geologist to the expedition.¹¹ The official map of the Long expedition labeled the entire plains region — including Oklahoma — the "Great Desert." Cartographers copied it for half a century.¹²

Desert or not, Oklahoma likely would have remained a part of Arkansas had not the question of establishing a permanent Indian frontier become a pressing issue. During the peace negotiations ending the War of 1812, the British government advanced the idea that a buffer Indian state should be erected in the northwest, to serve as a barrier between the United States and Canada. The United States rejected the buffer state idea, however, and even before the war ended, took vigorous measures to effect the removal of all tribes to the trans-Mississippi west. On August 9, 1814, following the decisive defeat of hostile Creek forces at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in Mississippi Territory, Major General Andrew Jackson forced some of the Creek chiefs to cede all their lands in southern Georgia as payment for war expenses.¹³ This cession, involving not only lands claimed by the Creek but also lands belonging to the Cherokee, became the first step in the systematic removal of the Five Civilized Tribes.

On September 12, 1816, Madison's Secretary of War, William H. Crawford, suggested that Jefferson's old proposal of exchanging lands be contemplated.¹⁴ At that time many individuals in the Cherokee nation expressed a desire to exchange their lands in Georgia and Mississippi Territory for lands in the vicinity of the White River in Arkansas.¹⁵ In October, 1816, Indian Com-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16th Congress, 2nd Session, 1819, p. 1222, p. 2602.

¹¹ Edwin James, editor, "Stephen H. Long's Expedition," *Early Western Travels*, edited by Thwaites, Vol. XIV, p. 20.

¹² Hay Alfred Hillington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, 2nd ed. (New York: 1966), p. 452.

¹³ "Foreign Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. III, pp. 715-717; Kappeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-110.

¹⁴ "Indian Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. VIII, p. 104.

¹⁵ Abel, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

missioner Andrew Jackson optimistically reported that "the Cherokees . . . will make a tender of their whole territory to the United States, for lands on the Arkansas." Jackson overestimated the Cherokee's disposition to remove; sentiment in the tribe was divided on the matter. Nevertheless, on July 8, 1817, a delegation of Cherokee chiefs signed a treaty exchanging about one-third of the tribal lands in the east for title to the tract already occupied by Western Cherokee in Arkansas between the White and Arkansas rivers.³⁶ Under the terms of the 1817 treaty possibly 4,000 Cherokees moved to Arkansas, where they found themselves soon at war with Osage hunting parties who claimed lands along the Arkansas as their hunting range.³⁷

During the final weeks of Madison's administration, the Senate Committee on the Public Lands urged that an appropriation be made to enable the President to negotiate Indian treaties which would exchange "territory owned by any tribe residing east of the Mississippi for other land west of that river." This effort to develop a well-defined removal policy failed, however, because the House did not pass an appropriation bill. Meanwhile Indian commissioners negotiating with the southern tribes found little enthusiasm for removal to the west. "They new [sic] nothing about that country," Andrew Jackson reported, "and as they have not been there they would have nothing to do with it."³⁸

In the early years of President James Monroe's administration the advance of white settlement into the trans-Mississippi West overshadowed the Indian removal question, and in 1819 the removal program became submerged beneath a congressional controversy over the extension of slavery. In 1819 the citizens of Missouri asked Congress to admit them into the Union as a slave state. Almost immediately the Missouri statehood bill developed into an intemperate debate over the future of slavery in the West. Both opponents and advocates of slavery extension described the area in question as a widespread fertile region one day to be inhabited by millions. When finally the Missouri controversy was settled by an agreement prohibiting slavery in the Louisiana Purchase north of 36°30', except for Missouri, Arkansas Territory with present-day Oklahoma was left open to slaveholders. The debates had not mentioned the reports that an

³⁶ "Indian Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. VIII, pp. 107-108; Kappeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-144.

³⁷ Thomas Nuttall, "A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory, 1819," *Early Western Travels*, edited by Thwaites, Vol. XIII, pp. 181-182.

³⁸ "Indian Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. VIII, pp. 123-124; *Journal of the Negotiation for Treaty with Chickasaws*, October 18, 1816, Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress.

American desert existed in the west; nor had the debates dealt with where in the west an area should be set aside for Indian removal.³⁹ Would the permanent Indian frontier lie above or below 36°30'?

By late 1820, developments indicated that the southern tribes would ultimately be resettled in Oklahoma, for on October 18, Indian Commissioner Andrew Jackson signed a treaty with the Choctaw tribe, exchanging lands in Mississippi for a western tract between the Arkansas and Red rivers. The new tract incongruously reached from the Western Cherokee land in Arkansas westward across unceded Comanche and Kiowa lands to the source of the Canadian River in present New Mexico. By earlier treaties that part of the Choctaw tract lying within present Arkansas had been emptied of Quapaw and Osage settlements, yet scarcely was the Choctaw treaty ratified before complaints came in from white citizens of Arkansas that they had prior claim to the land.⁴⁰ Of the 14,273 white citizens living in the territory, 400 families had settled within the Choctaw tract. They felt that the government had no right to burden Arkansas with Indian problems in order to relieve Mississippi of hers.⁴¹

A similar situation existed in Missouri. Trouble had risen between white settlers and a number of small tribes that had resettled there. In March, 1821, the General Assembly of Missouri asked the federal government to extinguish Indian title to all lands within the state, and remove the tribes that had immigrated into that state. In the early 1820's several removal treaties were negotiated, but actual removal was hampered because the government was unable to assign western Indian lands that were not already occupied. A workable, long-range removal policy was yet to be developed.⁴²

In the closing months of his administration, James Monroe responded to the intense interest in Indian removal expressed by the western states and recommended to Congress that the area between the "present States and Territories and the Rocky Mountains and Mexico" be divided into districts where the eastern tribes could be settled, *permanently* protected from white

³⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 15th Congress, 2nd Session, 1818-1819, pp. 1170-1172; 16th Congress, 1st Session, 1820, pp. 1209, 1579-1580.

⁴⁰ Kappler, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-196, 100-161, 167.

⁴¹ *Arkansas Gazette*, January 6, February 3, 1821; *Historical Statisticeer*, p. 13.

⁴² "Louisiana-Missouri Territory, 1815-1821," Vol. XV of *Territorial Papers of the United States*, pp. 583, 671, 700; "Indian Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. VIII, pp. 434-435.

encroachment.⁴¹ On December 16, 1824, the House adopted a resolution asking the Committee on Indian Affairs to examine the feasibility of organizing a permanent Indian Territory out of lands "lying west of the State of Missouri and territories of Arkansas and Michigan," a territory to be occupied "exclusively by Indians." Following recommendations of Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, the Senate drafted a removal bill conforming to the proposal.⁴²

Paradoxically, Senate debate on the bill described the proposed Indian territory as "among the most beautiful and fertile tracts of the country . . . Streams lined with timber intersect and beautify it in every direction." Upon some future period, "a numerous population would derive support from its fertility." Nevertheless, the same area was described as "a part of the country which will not answer our purposes of social intercourse and compact settlements." Those "delightful landscapes" were fit only for Indians. On February 23, 1825, the bill passed the Senate. The House, pressed with other business, failed to act on the measure.⁴³

Nevertheless, the proposal that all Indians be moved beyond a line west of Missouri, Arkansas, and Michigan, and that white settlement be prohibited west of that line, became an indispensable part of national policy. To maintain order along the frontier line, the United States army erected a chain of military posts. Fort Gibson and Fort Towson were constructed in 1824, and Fort Leavenworth was established in 1827. From 1825 to 1829, during the administration of President John Quincy Adams, the government negotiated a number of treaties that further concentrated Indians in the west. In June, 1825, the Kansas and Osage tribes ceded their claims to all lands within Missouri and Oklahoma, in exchange for lands in Kansas.⁴⁴ With unassigned lands now available for bargaining purposes, the government initiated removal negotiations with immigrant Choctaw and Cherokee in Arkansas Territory.

In 1825 the Choctaw succumbed to pressure from white settlers and surrendered their Arkansas holdings for a tract between the Canadian and Red rivers, the eastern limit of which became the present boundary between Oklahoma and Arkansas.

⁴¹ James D. Richardson, editor, *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 10 vols. (Washington: 1896), Vol. II, p. 261.

⁴² *Niles' Weekly Register*, Vol. XXVII, December 25, 1824, p. 271; "Indian Affairs," *American State Papers*, Vol. VIII, pp. 642-544.

⁴³ *Register of Debates*, 18th Congress, 2nd Session, (1824-1825), pp. 641-642, 646.

⁴⁴ Kappeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-214, 217-226.

In the winter of 1827 a delegation of eastern Choctaw explored the tribe's Oklahoma lands, and returned east reporting the area unsuitable for tribal settlement.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, a faction of the Creek tribe agreed to exchange their Georgia lands for unoccupied lands between the Canadian and Arkansas rivers in Oklahoma. In the spring of 1827 a Creek delegation explored their new acquisition and were reported highly pleased with the country.⁴⁸

In 1828 the Western Cherokee exchanged their Arkansas lands for a seven-million acre Oklahoma reservation north of that assigned the Choctaw, with an additional outlet fifty-eight miles wide, through which they could reach the buffalo ranges—and, incidentally, the hunting ground of the Kiowa. The government's motive in granting such an immense tract, a large portion of which was considered "only fit for hunting," was to make a favorable impression on the eastern Indians, "so as to reconcile them to emigration." This treaty stirred a great deal of dissension among the Arkansas Cherokee, for they felt that their chiefs had exchanged their country for another comparatively of no value. In ratifying the treaty the Senate attached a proviso stipulating that Cherokee lands should not extend above the 36th parallel; this provision reflected Congress' sentiment that the southern Indians—many of whom had acquired Negro slaves—were to be moved directly westward, preserving the Missouri Compromise.⁴⁹

In the north, Shawnee, Miami, Delaware, and other eastern tribes were placed on reservations west of the Kansas-Missouri border. The "permanent" Indian frontier—including present Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and parts of Iowa and Minnesota—seemed an established fact. Many of the treaties ratified during Adams' administration guaranteed the tribes that their newly assigned lands would remain theirs forever, and that the United States would keep white settlers from encroaching upon them.⁵⁰

Periodically the feasibility of continuing the policy of developing a permanent Indian territory was discussed in Congress. In December, 1826, the House of Representatives asked Secretary

⁴⁷"Rev. Isaac McCoy," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1870-1880*, Vol. II, p. 274; Edwin C. McReynolds, *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State* (Norman: 1954), pp. 131-132.

⁴⁸Kaypler, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-217; pp. 204-207; pp. 288-291; *Arkansas Gazette*, April 17, 1827, and June 25, 1828.

⁴⁹Kaypler, *Indian Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 288-91; *Arkansas Gazette*, (June 25, 1828); *Niles' Register*, Vol. XXXV, (November 29, 1828), p. 217; Anne Heloise Abel, *The American Indian As Slave Holder and Secessionist*, Vol. I, (Cleveland 1916), pp. 21-22.

⁵⁰Kaypler, *Indian Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 212, 288-89.

of War James Barbour to investigate the matter. A month later Barbour replied that the eastern tribes were divided in their willingness to emigrate; they were not acquainted with the "nature or situation of the country to which it is proposed to remove them;" yet the western tribes, "so far as this has been ascertained," were willing to receive them peacefully. The primary obstacle to a complete and final removal was the belief among the tribes that the federal government could not or would not fulfill its promise to guarantee their permanent undisturbed possession of their new homes. Already the Indian immigrants in eastern Oklahoma seemed in danger of being displaced once again, for about 2,600 white settlers had settled upon the Choctaw reservation. The likely area for permanent tribal settlement seemed to be even farther west, onto the Great Plains where the white plowman would hesitate to go, or north into Kansas where white penetration had hardly begun.⁵¹

When Andrew Jackson became president in 1829, the government's removal policy acquired a definite coercive tone. In a message to the Creek Indians he emphasized not the desirability but the necessity of removal. "You and my white children are too near to each other to live in harmony," he told them. "Beyond the great river Mississippi . . . your father has provided a country large enough for all of you . . . You can live upon it . . . as long as the grass grows or the water runs . . . It will be yours forever." Jackson warned the Creek that if they remained in their old homes the federal government could not protect them from the actions of the states wherein they resided. In a message to Congress on December 8, 1829, Jackson suggested that each tribe be guaranteed a distinct control of its own district in the west, that emigration from the east be voluntary, but should any choose to remain in the east then they must be subject to the laws of the states. In May, 1830, Congress responded to the President's suggestion and passed a removal bill which reflected the policy that had been pursued for years—except that now the tribes, coming under the intimidation of state laws, would be forced to remove.⁵²

With most of the arguments concerned with either humanitarianism or state sovereignty, the debates on the Removal Act of 1830 covered the entire history of Indian-government relations. Senator Peleg Sprague of Maine, an opponent of the bill, pointed out that the southern tribes had become civilized farmers: "It is proposed to send them from their cotton farms . . . to a

⁵¹ *Indian Affairs, American State Papers*, Vol. VIII, pp. 700-68.

⁵² *Niles' Register*, Vol. XXXVI, (June 18, 1829), p. 268; *Register of Debates*, 21st Cong., 1st sess. (1829-1830), p. 16 and Appendix, p. 1186.

distant and unsubdued wilderness . . . We send these natives of a southern clime to northern regions, amongst fierce and warlike barbarians." Congress seemed generally ignorant of the nature of the country where the removed Indians were to go. Opponents of the measure quoted from the journals of Stephen H. Long and Thomas Nuttall to show the area's unsuitability, while one advocate of the bill declared that those Indians who had already migrated were "delighted" with their new homes, and that "most of their brethren who remain in the States would gladly improve their present condition by joining them."⁵³

Proponents of the removal bill suggested that the emigrant tribes hopefully would form not only a barrier between white settlements and the tribes west of them, but also a buffer between the United States and Mexican territory. Occasionally a question arose concerning whether the resettling of slaveholding tribes west of Missouri and Arkansas involved a violation of the Missouri Compromise—unless the southern tribes relocated among their emigrant brothers below the thirty-sixth parallel. The debates as a whole suggested that the primary purpose of the bill was to allow the southern states to get rid of their Indians, with little thought given to the consequences of resettlement in the west.⁵⁴

Indian removals in Jackson's and subsequent administrations followed the pattern established in the 1820's; the populous southern tribes followed a "Trail of Tears" to Oklahoma and northern tribes were placed on reservations in eastern Kansas. In 1833 a new treaty with the Western Cherokee, occasioned because Cherokee and Creek lands were found to overlap, extended the northern boundary of the slaveholding Cherokee to the thirty-seventh parallel, technically violating the Missouri Compromise.⁵⁵ In 1834 the government sent a military expedition into the western plains and persuaded the Pawnee, Comanche, and Wichita to accept a treaty of peace and friendship with the immigrant Indians, whom they had been raiding. In 1837 a similar treaty was signed with the Kiowa, and army troops at the frontier garrisons guarded the southwestern frontier line against white encroachment.⁵⁶

Consequently, during the 1830's and 1840's white settlers turned their attention to other areas. In 1836 Arkansas contained enough population to warrant admission into the Union. In the same year white settlers advancing into Iowa organized

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 1017, 1073.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1051; Abel, *Indian Consolidation*, pp. 278-80; *Niles Register*, Vol. XXXVIII, (June 28, 1830), p. 67.

⁵⁵ *Keppel, Indian Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 365-68.

a new territory, displaced Indians in that area, and pushed the frontier line westward to the Missouri River—the eastern boundary of the present state of Nebraska. Meanwhile American settlers seized Texas from Mexico and westward expansion was channeled in that direction. Indian territory contained a number of white missionaries, traders, squaw-men, and squatters, but was generally bypassed as white immigrants headed for Texas, Oregon, California. A vast Indian Territory stretched from the Red River to the Missouri, and remained intact until Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.

During the preceding decade, the annexation of Texas and the acquisition of New Mexico and California brought sectional competition between north and south for a transcontinental railroad. Northerners, led by Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, sought to improve the north's chances for acquiring the coveted route by organizing the territory through which the northern route would run. In order to win southern support for his territorial bill, Douglas proposed that the unorganized area of the northern plains be divided into the two territories of Kansas and Nebraska, with the question of slavery to be decided by a popular vote of the territorial inhabitants.⁵⁶

A study of the congressional debates over the Kansas-Nebraska bill shows that once again the interests of the Indians were submerged beneath national political issues. Only Senators Sam Houston of Texas and John Bell of Tennessee, and Representative James Meacham of Vermont spoke in defense of tribal rights to the land. Although the bill contained provisions that the territory of any Indian tribe should not be included within the limits or jurisdiction of Kansas or Nebraska, the act contained no provision to protect the tribes from the local government of the whites who would surround them.⁵⁷

The Kansas-Nebraska Act placed the southern boundary of Kansas at the thirty-seventh parallel and, except for the unassigned Panhandle strip, gave to the remaining Indian Territory the same geographical limits as the present state of Oklahoma. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act prompted Senator Robert W. Johnson of Arkansas to introduce a bill to organize the remaining Indian Territory for white settlement, but

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 435-39, 438-70, 489-92, *Correspondence on Immigration of Indians*, Sen. Doc. 512, 23rd Cong., 1st sess. (1833-34), Vol. V, p. 754; Ernest Wallace and E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Comanche, Lords of the Southern Plains*, (Norman, 1952), p. 291; Hurlington, *Westward Expansion*, pp. 507-99.

⁵⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess. (1853-1854), Appendix, pp. 187, 202, 940; *U. S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. X, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., pp. 277-80.

The bill lacked northern support and did not come up for consideration.¹⁸ In 1855 Kansas politicians illegally included Indian lands in the first districting of their territory for election purposes. With their lands obviously in jeopardy, the small immigrant tribes who had resettled in Kansas found that the best place remaining for them to go was among the southern tribes in Oklahoma. In the 1850's and 1860's the federal government completed a number of treaties which placed such diverse tribes as the Cheyenne, Miami, and Tonkawa on tracts located among the lands of the southern tribes. By 1874 Oklahoma contained Indians from such distant tribes as the Seminole in Florida, the Seneca from upper New York, and the Modoc from the Pacific northwest.¹⁹

How then does one explain specifically why Oklahoma became the principal resettlement area for the nation's Indians? Because of its comparative inaccessibility during colonial times, its reported barrenness, and its Comanche-Kiowa-Osage barrier, Oklahoma remained practically untouched by white civilization until the nineteenth century. Meanwhile the eastern settlements continuously pressured the government into carrying out a removal program which confiscated tribal lands and pushed eastern tribes beyond the Mississippi. The first southern Indians to migrate west of the Mississippi favored Arkansas because of its fertile valleys, its accessibility, and its relative freedom from fierce indigenous tribes. White settlers favored the Arkansas valleys for the same reasons, however, and by 1825 had arrived in enough numbers to displace the Indian immigrants in the same manner in which they had been crowded out earlier. Following the takeover of Arkansas by white settlement, the next most accessible area for the southern tribes was Oklahoma. The Missouri Compromise in 1820 in effect decreed that the populous slaveholding southern tribes would be resettled below the line 36°30'.

The first tier of northern white settlements to develop west of the Mississippi followed precedent and demanded tribal lands and Indian removal into the dry plains of Kansas and Nebraska, where pioneer farmers at the time cared not to go. Finally, northern desire for a transcontinental railroad route and southern desire for more slave territory resulted in the Kansas-Nebraska Act which for a time left only Oklahoma for the immigrant Indians. In 1889, when the government responded to pressure

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263; Joseph B. Thoburn and Meriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People*, (New York, 1926), Vol. I, pp. 272-73; Abel, *The American Indian*, pp. 35-36; Kappler, *Indian Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 706-08, 756, 940, 960, 984; Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, pp. 184, 228, 238, 260.

from landless whites and opened Oklahoma to white settlement, the last Indian frontier crumbled away. The grass grew, the water ran, but not as forcefully as the land-hungry pioneer farmers.