How were Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw tribes ‘removed?’

What was the Treaty of Doak’s Stand? The U.S. government appointed committees to handle its business with native peoples. They were white men known as Indian commissioners because they worked with Indians. Beginning in 1818, for three consecutive years, the commissioners met annually with Choctaw leaders to discuss removal. In 1820, they met at Doak’s Stand, Mississippi, to discuss terms of a treaty.

The terms were that Choctaws would cede five million acres, about one-third of their land in the East, in exchange for thirteen million western acres. They would also receive financial and practical assistance with moving, and then annuities (annual payments to the tribe).

One of the commissioners was Andrew Jackson, a frontiersman and military leader. He repeatedly warned the Indians that if they did not move, they would certainly perish in the East, and that if they did not accept the treaty, they would jeopardize friendly relations with the government. Chief Pushmataha and a few others knew that Jackson spoke the truth. They persuaded the tribe to accept the terms. On October 18, 1820, the Choctaw leaders and the Indian commissioners signed the Treaty of Doak’s Stand.

Most white people who knew about the treaty felt that it was fair to everyone. The Choctaws, though, were doubtful. They had dealt with whites for more than two centuries and with the U.S. for half a century. Their doubts were verified when Arkansas settlers protested the treaty. The U.S. was giving away land which was already settled by whites — more than three thousand of them. The Choctaws refused to keep the agreement. They were now less confident than ever that the government would keep its word.

For the next eight years, negotiations continued. They led to several shaky agreements, none of which was carried out. In each case, Congress refused to ratify the treaty or an incident occurred, such as with the Treaty of Doak’s Stand, causing the Choctaws to change their minds. Until 1828, removal remained voluntary.

How did electing Andrew Jackson president affect Indian re-
moval? In the nineteenth century, white men had the power to vote and Indians did not. Whites began to elect public officials who were willing to remove the Indian from eastern soil. They elected Andrew Jackson as President in 1828. Jackson was dedicated to Indian removal and had a profound effect on it.

Many Southern states began to pass oppressive laws to restrict the powers of tribal governments. Indian leaders went to Washington to plead for the protection they had been promised. But federal officials, intimidated by pioneer delegations who were demanding Indian removal, did nothing.

In 1832, Chief Justice John Marshall of the U.S. Supreme Court declared that legislative actions restricting tribal functions were unconstitutional. Elated, tribesmen petitioned the President to act upon the decision and grant them protection. Jackson responded that he was “powerless in the matter.” He stated the only hope for the Indians was “to accept their fate and move to the West.”

Jackson’s refusal to comply with his constitutional duty was the final blow for the Southern Indians who had vigorously fought removal. New treaties were signed, and the Five Civilized Tribes began to move west.

What was the Indian Removal Act? With Andrew Jackson as President, removal efforts intensified. In response to the President’s statements to Congress in December 1829, the state of Mississippi passed laws canceling special privileges for the Choctaws and restricting tribal functions. In May 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. This act, although calling for land exchanges with the Indians, did not authorize a forced removal. It did, however, give Jackson the power to push for removal, and many Indians saw it as inevitable.

How did Choctaws react to the Indian Removal Act? The tribe was divided. Leaders were removed from office and replaced. Few Choctaws actually wanted to leave their homelands, but many felt that without removal, the tribe would not survive. Others felt that somehow the government could be made to honor its past agreements and protect the tribe. Jackson took advantage of these divisions. Through the commissioners, he made personal offers to Indian leaders. He promised tracts of land and annuities. Leaders who gave in to temptation agreed to push for removal. A number of them, already convinced that removal was inevitable, accepted the gifts and felt that they had “put one over” on the government.
What was the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek? In September 1830, negotiations re-opened. About six thousand Choctaws gathered at the forks of Dancing Rabbit Creek in Noxubee County, Mississippi. Secretary of War John Eaton attended with John Coffee, the government representative.

A number of gamblers and saloon-keepers also attended. They hoped to capitalize on the event. Yet missionaries were denied attendance. “The conference was neither the time nor the place for missionary activities,” according to federal officials. In reality, the government feared the political influence of the missionaries who had cautioned the Indians against certain agreements in the past.

The Choctaws expressed dissatisfaction with the land they were offered in the West. Further, they asked for other concessions, such as permanent security guarantees. The commissioners threatened to close negotiations and reminded the Choctaws that they could remain in the East and be subject to the oppressive state laws.

The Indians signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek on December 27, 1830, with the following provisions:

1. Choctaws would surrender 10,423,130 acres in Mississippi; and
2. They would receive a similar amount of acreage in Indian Territory.
3. Removal would take place over three years, removing about one-third of the people each year.
4. The U.S. would pay all expenses of removal, furnish transportation and supplies, and provide for basic needs in the new land for one year.
5. The U.S. would protect new Choctaw lands against intruders.
6. It would provide a twenty thousand dollar annuity for twenty years, as well as a continuation of all past annuities.
7. It would provide funds to educate 40 Choctaw children per year for twenty years. It would give another $2,500 for the hiring of three teachers for Choctaw schools each year as well.
8. The U.S. would make $10,000 available to erect necessary public buildings in Indian Territory.
9. Each Choctaw family would receive personal, domestic, and farm articles for beginning life in the West.
10. Chiefs would receive land gifts.
11. Choctaws who wished to remain in Mississippi would be given

Do You Know?

Spiro Mounds, Oklahoma’s only archaeological park, is made up of 140 acres encompassing 12 southern mounds containing evidence of an Indian culture that occupied the site from 850 A.D. to 1450 A.D.
land allotments there and made citizens of the state.

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek firmly established government policy on Indian removal. Jefferson had hoped for voluntary removal. Calhoun had hoped that education would show the Indians the desirability of it. Jackson, however, believed it was a necessity, and he forced the issue.

**How did Choctaws respond to the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek?** A small band of Choctaws left immediately for Indian Territory. They were tired of the dissension in the tribe and of the intrusion by whites, and they were anxious to obtain choice lands. For most of the tribe, however, the political dissension continued. Confusion and distress clouded their removal issues.

The tribe selected and approved land. The government counted 18,635 Indians, whites married to Indians, and slaves of the Indians to remove.

Secretary of War John Eaton left office in 1831. Lewis Cass, who knew little about removal procedures, replaced him, and removal was delayed. The first party of four thousand finally left for Indian Territory in October, 1831. Conditions on the journey were grueling. Divided into three groups, the last of the party arrived at their destination in March, 1832. Two hundred and fifty had died on the nightmarish trip.

**What happened during the second removal?** Another change took place in the government with the resignation of Secretary Cass. John Robb, Acting Secretary of War, declared that the cost of the first removal handled by civilian contractors had been too high. He ordered the army to carry out the second removal. Like the first, it did not begin until October because of governmental changes and delays.

This second party was aware of the more ample supplies and better planning which the military had provided. The people hoped for a smooth and uneventful trip. Unfortunately, travel was slow because the government had decided that everyone who was not sick or elderly

*Peter Pitchlynn led the 1828 Choctaw expedition into southeastern Oklahoma to evaluate the tribe’s new homeland. He reported the area unsuitable, but the Choctaws were moved anyway. He was also known as Ha-choo-tuck-nee or Snapping Turtle.*
would walk. Then a cholera *epidemic* struck the group. The army divided the Choctaws into subgroups and changed their routes to avoid the deadly disease. Still, the death toll of the second removal was higher than the first.

From an economic standpoint, however, when the second removal was completed in February, it was more successful than the first one. The army moved more Indians for less money.

**How did Choctaws respond to the third removal?** While preparations began for the third removal, news of the suffering of the first two parties reached the Choctaws in Mississippi. Many refused to go, fearing for their lives. In October 1833, only about nine hundred Choctaws reported for removal, and their trip was no better than the first two had been. After a boiler explosion aboard a riverboat killed several of them, two-thirds of the group refused to board another boat. Instead, they walked overland through heavy rains without adequate supplies. Disease and exposure again took their toll. Despite these tragedies, the third group traveled more quickly than the first two. They arrived in Indian Territory in December, just before Christmas.

Although thousands of Choctaws remained in the East, the treaty had provided only for a three-year endeavor. The official government removal was over. William Ward was the agent in charge of registering those who wanted to stay in Mississippi. He shuffled and re-shuffled papers so that only a few actually registered, and removals continued unofficially. Pressure from whites succeeded in sending small groups westward periodically until the Civil War.

**What were responses to inhumane treatment of Indians during the removals?** Some whites who saw the suffering of the Choctaws wrote to officials in Washington, protesting the inhumane conditions. One farmer wrote of giving a group of starving Indians permission to enter his pumpkin field. “These [pumpkins] they ate raw with the greatest avidity [eagerness],” he said. He pointed out that, even though the Choctaws were starving, they refused to enter the field without his permission.

Nevertheless, in Washington, officials looked the other way. Elbert Herring, head of the War Department’s new Bureau of Indian Affairs, said, “The humane policy . . . adopted by the government with respect to the Indian tribes . . . is now in operation . . .” The Bureau closed its eyes to the cruel treatment and neglect of the Choctaws and other removing tribes. It also ignored the treatment of those who remained in the East,
and who eventually lost most of their land.

In the West, the survivors of the removal felt stunned and grief-stricken. The divisions in the tribe were still damaging, and confusion reigned for a time. Soon, however, the survivors rallied and re-organized. They built homes and schools and churches. They raised crops and opened businesses. They adopted a constitution based on that of the U.S. They elected officials. The Choctaws made their own laws and successfully governed themselves, despite white interference, for the next three-quarters of a century.

**How did Creek Indians disagree within their tribe?** The Creek tribe also experienced problems. In fact, their internal strife was even greater than that of the Choctaws. The Creeks were divided into two distinct factions. The Lower Creeks were mixed-bloods, led by the McIntosh family. The Upper Creeks were full-bloods, led by Opothleyahola.

The Lower Creeks, who resided in Georgia, found themselves subject to government pressure, as the Choctaws had been, after the 1802 signing of the Georgia Compact. The Upper Creeks in Alabama were having similar problems. Everywhere, white settlements surrounded the Creeks.

The tribe lost a great deal of land through several treaties signed after 1802. In 1811, the Creek Council passed a measure imposing the death penalty on anyone who gave up Creek lands without approval of the Council.

**Who was Tecumseh?** In 1811, Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief from the North, visited the Creeks. He encouraged a tribal alliance and Indian Confederacy. By uniting, Tecumseh believed, the Indians could stop the continual encroachment of the whites onto their lands. The Creek Council refused to support the confederacy. In fact, Tecumseh’s visit further divided the tribe. The “conservatives” supported the Shawnee chief’s views. They wanted to make war on the whites to protect their lands and possibly to regain them. The “progressives” opposed Tecumseh’s views. They approved of the white culture and would sell Creek lands.

**Who were the Red Sticks?** During the War of 1812, the Red Sticks began attacking white settlements. The Red Sticks were Creeks and conservative warriors. They carried small, red-colored clubs which they believed were magic. When they attacked Fort Mims, Alabama, in 1813, the army sent Andrew Jackson to stop them. Many loyal Creeks
and others of the southeastern tribes fought with Jackson against the Red Sticks. Nevertheless, when he defeated the Red Sticks, the entire Creek tribe suffered. Tribal leaders signed the Treaty of Fort Jackson in August 1814. It required the tribe to cede much of its land in Alabama and southern Georgia.

**Why was William McIntosh executed by Creek warriors?** William McIntosh had helped pass the 1811 law requiring the death of anyone who sold tribal lands. Over time, he became convinced that the only chance for the survival of the tribe was to sell their remaining lands and move west. After he became sole tribal chief, McIntosh led his followers in signing the Treaty of Indian Springs on February 12, 1825. Although the Indian commissioners knew that the treaty did not represent the body of the tribe, they presented it to the President. He sent it to Congress for ratification. The treaty called for the exchange of Creek lands in Georgia and Alabama for land in Indian Territory.

The Creek Council met and passed judgment against McIntosh. On May 1, one hundred Creek warriors surrounded the McIntosh home and set fire to it. When the fire forced McIntosh outside, the warriors shot and killed him in his own doorway.

**How did President John Quincy Adams deal with Creek hostilities?** The President at this time was John Quincy Adams. When he heard of the Creek hostility against the treaty, he invited tribal chiefs to Washington to draft another agreement. They declared the Indian Springs Treaty invalid. The new agreement called for ceding of Creek lands just in Georgia and arranged for McIntosh’s followers to go to Indian Territory.

But pressure continued for removal. In March 1832, Opothleyahola and six other chiefs signed a new agreement, ceding all their tribal lands east of the Mississippi River. They agreed to leave Alabama as soon
as possible, and the government agreed to pay removal expense. The government further agreed that no Creeks would be forced to leave the state. This no-force clause allowed Creeks to select an allotment from former tribal lands and live there as state citizens.

**Why were Creeks forcibly removed?** The next few years were chaotic. Division intensified as certain groups prepared to move west while others were determined to stay in the East. Still others wanted to abandon Indian Territory and move into Texas. The government did not restrain whites from moving onto Creek lands, and there was fighting between the Indians and the settlers. The Seminoles were engaged in a war with the United States, and some groups of Creek warriors joined the Seminoles.

The U.S. Army called upon Brigadier General Winfield Scott to end the “Creek War.” The government ignored the no-force clause of the treaty. Scott’s troops rounded up some fifteen thousand Creeks and moved them west, with 2,500 of them in chains. When the first group reached Montgomery, Alabama, in July 1836, the *Advertiser* reported, “To see the remnant of a once mighty people, fettered and chained together — forced to depart from the land of their Fathers into a country unknown to them — is of itself sufficient to move the stoutest heart.”

The Creeks lost many of their people on the trip west. They arrived at Fort Gibson in the spring of 1837, where officials were not prepared to care for them. Another 3,500 Creeks died there from exposure and disease.

Furthermore, when the newcomers arrived in Indian Territory, the McIntosh group had already been there several years. Initially they disagreed over leadership, but soon the eastern Creeks submitted to the leadership of the western group under Principal Chief Roley McIntosh. Old wounds were slow to heal, and members of the two groups seldom mixed socially. Despite these problems, the tribe managed to live peacefully for the rest of its self-governing days.

**What were the differences in the way white people dealt with Chickasaws?** Of all the tribes in the Southeast, the Chickasaws were the most prosperous. They had been the first to adjust to white ways, making a living by farming and raising livestock. Men directed the farm work. Women handled spinning, weaving, and other household duties. Many of them owned slaves, lived in beautiful homes, and dressed in the style of the whites.

Most Chickasaws had turned to farming only after reducing tribal
lands had made hunting unprofitable. Since 1786, when they signed a treaty allowing a trading post at Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River, every treaty had sought tribal lands.

In 1802, the federal government set up “factories,” or trading posts, through which tribes could buy goods on credit. Officials encouraged the Chickasaws to use the credit to build up debts, and then pressured them to cede their lands in payment of those debts. Within three years, the Chickasaws owed $12,000. In 1805, the Chickasaws ceded all their lands north of the Tennessee River to pay their debts.

By 1826, after forty years of treaties, they had given up lands in Tennessee and Kentucky. They were reduced to an area in northern Mississippi and northwestern Alabama. This last area was the tribal homeland where the Ancients, their ancestors, were buried. They honored the land and vowed to sell no more of it.

**How did Chickasaw tribal leadership change?** Many full-blooded Chickasaws could not adjust to farming, which they considered women’s work. Now they were idle warriors and often turned to drinking. In some cases, the government supplied the liquor and said it was a “gift” to secure their goodwill. Otherwise, the liquor was bought from unscrupulous traders.

More and more full-bloods withdrew into the hills and turned to old customs for comfort. They saw the ease with which the mixed-blood members carried on their new lifestyle, however, and looked to them for guidance.

Thus, the tribe gradually yielded leadership to the mixed-bloods. They had attended white schools and adopted white culture. They kept full-blood leaders in their positions and observed traditional ceremonies, but these actions were mainly a show of respect. The real leadership was in the hands of the mixed-bloods, and they managed to save their homelands for a while.

The Chickasaws passed tribal laws to improve law enforcement and to give greater protection to private property. Large numbers of tribesmen turned to Christianity, and some became skilled in commerce. They started large farming ventures, producing cotton and other crops with slave labor. They allowed the government to build roads through their lands and then created inns, ferries, and other services for travelers.

Perhaps their most profitable and successful endeavor was in the trading business. The mixed-blood councils eliminated permanent trading posts not operated by a member of their nation. Further, they de-
manded that treaty payments be made in “specie,” or money, rather than in blankets, tools, or other goods. Then, when individuals received their portions of the money, they took it to a Chickasaw-operated business to buy goods. This kept the money in circulation in the Chickasaw Nation rather than profiting outside suppliers.

**Why did whites resent the Chickasaws?** Whites resented the success of the Chickasaws. They wrote letters to Washington complaining that when they traveled through Chickasaw lands, there were only Chickasaws with whom to do business. In the minds of many whites, Indians should have been educated sufficiently to do menial tasks and to handle their everyday business by spending their money with white traders. They should never have been given enough education to go into business. They should never have been able to take white money into that business.

The Chickasaws had tried to assimilate. Their plan failed, just as it had with other tribes. Even though whites had insisted that this was the answer to the “Indian problem,” they found the Indians even less acceptable as competitors. The cry for removal grew louder and louder.

At first the Chickasaw leaders tried to avoid it by ignoring it, saying simply that the Chickasaw Nation would not leave its homeland. Gradually they began to see the inevitability of it, especially when state laws voided their sovereignty. Then they tried to postpone the date of removal by signing treaties which required Chickasaw leaders to explore the western lands and find a place suitable for the tribe.

**What was the Treaty of Pontotoc?** The Treaty of Pontotoc was
first signed in 1832 and amended in 1834. It ceded all Chickasaw lands east of the Mississippi River in exchange for lands in the West. More than six million acres of Chickasaw land were to be sold. The first of it went on the auction block in 1836, even before tribesmen had located a suitable new home in the West. The government moved the Chickasaws to temporary locations on their former lands while it sold their property to eager white buyers.

**What was the Treaty at Doaksville?** Finally, on January 17, 1837, Chickasaw leaders signed an agreement with Choctaw leaders in the West. At Doaksville, Choctaw Nation, the Choctaws agreed to sell a portion of the central and western areas of their nation in southern Indian Territory to the Chickasaws for $530,000.

Meanwhile, in the East, the federal government abandoned all semblance of protection. One official remarked that an “alarming influx of disreputable whites” had made their way into the tribal lands and were mixing with the Indians, with disastrous results.

James Colbert, a mixed-blood leader, petitioned the President for help in forcing whites to cooperate with the treaties until the Indians were removed. He related that “speculators scoured the countryside... lying to the hapless Indians, telling them they must sign a blank deed to their property for $5 or less immediately and making promises they never intended to fulfill.” President Jackson ignored the plea.

Within a month of the Treaty at Doaksville, preparations were being made for the first emigration. The government decreed that each emigrating Indian have daily rations of one pound of fresh beef or pork, three-fourths of a pound of salt pork or bacon, three cups of corn or cornmeal or one pound of wheat flour, and 1/100th of a gallon of salt.

Contractors were to arrange to have rations deposited at various locations along the way, specifically at Memphis, Little Rock, and Fort Coffee. Each group was also to be assigned a conductor, someone to lead the way; a physician; and a disbursement officer, someone to account for supplies at each depot and issue rations.

**What happened during the first Chickasaw removal?** In late June 1837, the first group of 450 Chickasaws moved out of Chief Sealy’s district behind conductor John M. Millard. They crossed the Mississippi River from Memphis into Arkansas on July 4. Almost immediately they met drenching rains that completely washed out the roads in many places. Camps were wet and fires were impossible. Dysentery and fever began to take their toll. The physician blamed these medical problems
on Indian “dissipation” rather than on the conditions of travel.

In addition to poor weather, the Indians were given bad rations. A number of suppliers dumped rations on open docks or beside the road to rot in the sun. By the time the Indians picked them up, the food had spoiled.

Millard’s party divided into three groups. The ill and those in need went from Memphis to Fort Coffee by riverboat, arriving there in a matter of days. The second group, after finding dry land and meeting no more rains, traveled at an amazing rate of thirteen miles per day. They arrived at Fort Coffee a few days later. The third group, however, chose not to eat the spoiled rations and loitered in hunting camps. They moved three miles per day at most. It seemed the more government officials urged them to hurry, the slower they moved. The men hunted deer, while the women and children worked in the camps and took care of the sick. Finally, threatened with troops to drive them onward, they continued their journey at a normal pace. They arrived at Fort Coffee on September 5, 1837.

What happened during the second Chickasaw removal? The superintendent of the Chickasaw removal was A.M.M. Upshaw of Pulaski, Tennessee. While Millard conducted his charges through the wilderness, Upshaw was busy readying for the second phase. He moved four thousand Chickasaws to emigration camps and marched them from there to Memphis. Upshaw planned to move them to Fort Coffee on six riverboats. He wanted to load their livestock on barges and have the boats tow the barges downriver.

The tribe, though, heard about the riverboat boiler that had exploded in 1833. That accident had killed Indians and subjected the survivors to more exposure and illness. One thousand Chickasaws refused to board the boats at Memphis. Upshaw pleaded and cajoled to no avail. When he threatened to stop their rations, a Chickasaw leader reminded him that they were paying for their own rations from the sale of their eastern lands. Upshaw could not force those thousand to board. They would go on land. He did carry the three thousand other Chickasaws and their slaves on the riverboats. It took eight days to reach Fort Coffee. Six weeks later, the survivors of the one thousand walking tribesmen arrived. The heat, muddy swamps, unsanitary conditions, and spoiled rations had been terrible.

Early in 1838, Superintendent Upshaw dismissed his conductors and other contractors. He reported to the government that his job was
finished, and that only about twenty families remained in the East, most of them slaves. He felt they were capable of moving themselves. Actually, more than five hundred Chickasaws remained in the East. Later the government offered $30 for the removal of each Indian or slave.

**What happened during the third Chickasaw removal?** Certain leaders had waited to *emigrate*, hoping to get a better price for their temporary homesteads. These leaders — the Colberts, the Loves, and the Overtons among them — bought wagons and began moving their tribesmen west. They managed some of the most successful removals.

Some historians have criticized these mixed-blood leaders because they made a profit while “helping” their tribesmen. Without these businessmen, however, many widows, orphans, and *destitute* Chickasaws would have found the journey impossible. They would have suffered at the hands of people who wanted to steal their allotments and their money.

Even after the later trips were made, Chickasaws continued to move west. Some of those hidden in the hills of their homelands did not move west until 1850.

**How was life for the Chickasaws in Indian Territory?** The troubles of the Chickasaw didn’t end when they arrived in Indian Territory. They had bought a portion of Choctaw land, but now bands of Kiowas, Comanches, and other western tribes considered them poachers and harassed them. A good number of Chickasaws remained in camps around Fort Coffee and near the Choctaw towns, where contractors continued to supply spoiled food. Many Indians believed this was an effort by the
whites to destroy them. Many squandered their government payments in frustration and hopelessness.

Smallpox and other diseases killed more than five hundred Chickasaws and the Choctaws who had come into contact with them. The Choctaws began to resent them. Gradually, however, the government controlled the western tribes and curbed their hostility so the Chickasaws could settle their new lands. Like the other tribes, they established towns, schools, and farms. They had agreed to live under Choctaw government, but eventually they made their own government and lived on friendly terms with those around them.

Among the Five Civilized Tribes, the Chickasaws had shown great foresight in adapting to, and succeeding at, white culture. They were the wealthiest and proudest of all the eastern Indian nations. Yet their success would not guarantee acceptance. Even though they had the lowest mortality rate on their western journeys, they lost the most in terms of spirit and finance. They were perhaps the slowest of the five nations to recover.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What agreements were made by both signing parties in the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek?
2. Discuss the signing of the Treaty of Indian Springs and conclude with why the treaty was declared invalid.
3. What was the Georgia Compact and what was its effect upon the taking of Indian lands?
4. What effects did the election of Andrew Jackson have upon removal?
5. What was the major provision of the Indian Removal Act of 1830?
6. How did the Indian Removal Act affect the Indians?
7. How did the Choctaws react to removal proposals?
8. What was the major resolution passed by the Creek Council of 1811?
9. Who were the Red Sticks? Give a complete answer.
10. Who executed William McIntosh and why?