RICE UNIVERSITY

Sovereign Spaces:
Negotiating Native and Federal Power in the Old Southwest

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

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HOUSTON, TEXAS
MAY 2016
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Colonel Henry Dodge of the U.S. dragoons waited nervously at the bottom of a high bluff on the plains of what is now southwestern Oklahoma. A Comanche man on a white horse was barreling down the bluff toward Dodge and the remnants of the dragoon company that stood waiting with him. For weeks the dragoons had been wandering around the southern plains, hoping to meet the Comanches and impress them with the United States’ military might. However, almost immediately after the dragoon company of 500 men had departed from Fort Gibson in June 1834, they were plagued by a feverish illness and suffered from the lack of adequate provisions and potable water. When General Henry Leavenworth, the group’s leader, was taken ill near the Washita River, Dodge took command, pressing forward in the July heat with about one-fifth of the original force.

The Comanche man riding swiftly toward Dodge was part of a larger group that the dragoons had spotted earlier on the hot July day. Since then the dragoons and the Comanches had been dancing across the bluffs, with the Comanches observing the troops from the tops of the bluffs before retreating when the troops approached. Eventually, however, the Comanches chose one man to approach the Americans. Dodge and the dragoons were probably nervous when they realized that one of the Comanches was actually riding toward them, even though they could see that he carried a steel lance with a white cloth tied to the top as a symbol of his peaceful intentions.

The dragoons’ nervousness and tension must have quickly turned to surprise once the Comanche man arrived. Although he was dressed like the Indian that they expected, the man told
the group that his name was “Hey-soos-sanches,” and the Americans soon discovered that they could more easily communicate with him by speaking Spanish.¹ The Americans were further astonished when, after the rest of the Comanche group approached, the Comanches insisted that each of their party should shake the hands of each of the Americans. The Comanches knew that the handshake was the greeting Americans most commonly used among themselves. Thus within the span of only a few moments, multiple preconceived ideas the Americans had about the Comanches were proven untrue. The Indians were not only welcoming, but were also able to communicate that welcome in a way that the troops recognized, an astonishing discovery for the Americans, who considered the Comanches to be just another “savage” plains group.

Additionally, the dragoons had departed from Fort Gibson with the assumption that the Comanches had never been contacted by representatives of the United States government, and perhaps had never met any Americans at all. More important, the dragoons left for the West with the assumption that the Comanches were hostile, not only toward Americans, but toward the project of removal that in 1834 was bringing thousands of eastern Indians into the West, right on the borders of what was thought to be Comanche territory. The dragoons’ mission had been to make contact with the Comanches, intimidate them with the presence of a large number of U.S. troops, and thus obtain their assent to continued removals. The handshake greetings that the Comanches insisted on must have indicated to Dodge that the Comanches had a much different perspective on the situation than U.S. officials had realized, but whether Dodge fully grasped the

¹ The man’s Spanish name was thus probably “Jesús Sanchez.” His Comanche name is unknown. See Fred S. Perrine, ed., “The Journal of Hugh Evans, Covering the First and Second Campaigns of the United States Dragoon Regiment in 1834 and 1835. Campaign of 1834,” Chronicles of Oklahoma 3 (September 1925), pp. 185-88.
Comanches’ perspective on removal and the increasing presence of U.S. officials in the region, either at that moment or in his subsequent meetings with their leaders, is unclear.²

I argue that historians have missed the significance of the story of Colonel Dodge’s encounter with the Comanches in July 1834, particularly how it is exemplary of the confusion and misperceptions with which the U.S. government operated as it attempted to implement its removal policies in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. Beginning almost immediately after the Louisiana Purchase, federal officials began planning for the ways that they might use the newly acquired western territory to remove Native populations from the East, spending little time learning about the contexts of the western places where they planned to remove those people. Eager to capitulate to the demands of white settlers to remove Native Americans from valuable cotton-producing lands in the southeast and fertile grain-growing lands in the Ohio River valley, U.S. government officials hurtled headlong into the project of Indian removal with little certain information about the people they were removing, the places they were supposed to go, and the Native people that they would encounter in the Old Southwest.

Historians have placed little emphasis on the actual space that Native peoples both purposefully migrated toward and were forcibly removed to in the nineteenth century, but this very fluid borderland space between the United States, the Comanche and Osage empires, and Spain made an important difference to how the process of Indian removals, migrations, and

diasporas in the nineteenth century unfolded. Historians of Indian removal have already deeply explored the contexts in the east which led to removal, combing newspapers, letters of Native leaders and federal officials, court records, and countless other documents, but they have yet to investigate the contexts that existed in the West, which had an equally important effect on the process of removal and the development and outcome of federal policies. Those eastern contexts were vastly important, but the story of removal is about more than the lead-up to and the literal process of forced westward migration. For the federal government, removal was about the beginning of a long-term project to entirely remove Native people from American society. The location for the removals was an important part of that long-term plan, but U.S. officials assumed much more knowledge and control about those locations than they actually possessed. Thus one of the most significant contributions this dissertation makes to the historiography of Indian removal is to show how, in light of the lack of federal knowledge about the West, removal policies actually affected both the Native people that they were imposed on and the Native people who already lived in the Old Southwest.

Additionally, most histories of removal are based on the assumption of increased federal power, knowledge, and control over time. This interpretation of events is not entirely untrue. Looking at the very large picture of United States-Native American relations over the course of several centuries, the decline of Native power and the rise of the United States seems inevitable and predictable. My contribution is to show that this process was much more uneven.

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3 My focus on place helps situate my work within the borderlands school. As Brian DeLay has written, “Borderlands history... is most fundamentally the history of a spatial context: of places where people interacted across multiple, independent political and legal systems. Put more succinctly, borderlands are zones of plural sovereignty.” In *North American Borderlands*, p. 3. See also “Middle Grounds, Borderlands, and Frontiers” in Pekka Hamalainen and Benjamin H. Johnson, eds., *Major Problems in the History of North American Borderlands* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), pp. 83-131.
complicated, and contested, and can even be seen very clearly in the history of removal, which is often used as the primary example of the moment when the U.S. federal government achieved a new level of control over Native people.

Spanning areas of the present-day states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri, the Old Southwest was technically bought by the United States as part of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, yet it remained an expansive borderlands space where no single polity exercised complete sovereignty. For decades after the purchase the federal government had very little knowledge about this southwestern region or the Native peoples who lived there. My dissertation shows that what knowledge federal officials in the West did gain about their surroundings was rarely applied to policy decisions or passed down to the federal agents who followed them, partly because of the high turnover rate for western Indian agents and also because, despite numerous attempts at reform, the administrative structure of Indian affairs remained a complicated system with an unclear chain of command.4

In 1789, the newly-established federal government took control of Indian affairs from the states, assuming that the United States had inherited Britain’s claims to ultimate sovereignty over most of North America, a right that was legally termed the “doctrine of discovery.” Thus federal officials began signing dozens of treaties with Native nations, most of which contained provisions for land cessions in addition to the usual platitudes about peace and eternal friendship. Euro-Americans had always believed that Native people claimed much more land than they

actually needed, thus making land cessions a logical part of almost every federal treaty.\textsuperscript{5} It was implied in these land cession provisions that Native people would remove themselves from the lands that they had ceded, moving onto other adjacent lands, or wherever they wanted as long as it was further away from growing white settlements. Where Native people were going to live after a land cession was not originally supposed to be the federal government’s problem.

However, it is clear from the earliest land cessions and removals that for the various federal officials and Native groups who were involved, “removal” had very different meanings that changed over time. From a federal perspective, removal meant literally removing Native people out of the way of white settlers. It was a practical response to what federal officials perceived as a real problem. But on a more theoretical level, for most federal officials removal was also ultimately about removing the federal government from the obligation of treating Native groups as separate, sovereign nations. Removal to the West was supposed to be the beginning of that process because it would consolidate Native groups onto more manageable sections of land. Another important part of the removal process was the idea that removing to the West would more quickly lead Native people to adopt what federal officials regarded as the most central aspects of American culture: subsistence farming and Christianity. Future land cessions, they believed, would be easier if Native people took up Anglo-American farming practices and could see for themselves that they needed much less land than they claimed. Additionally,

adopting “civilization” was supposed to lead Native people to see the superiority of American
culture and agree to dissolve their sovereign national governments, eventually (and permanently)
relieving the federal government of the “Indian problem.” Thus from the beginning federal
Indian policies, whatever the particulars of those policies, were ultimately aimed at dissolving
the sovereignty of Native nations.6

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, while the federal government began
haphazardly implementing policies designed to assert its own sovereignty and remove Indians
from the East, many Native people were moving into the West for their own reasons and on their
own terms. These Native-initiated migrations into the trans-Mississippi West posed an additional
complication for federal officials who wanted to control the westward movement of Native
populations. Even though the expansion of the U.S. population put enough pressure on Native
lands, cultures, and resources to push Native people out of the East, there were also powerful
reasons for those same groups to be pulled into the West. Historians Brian DeLay and Pekka
Hamalainen have described how the Comanches built a massive trading empire in the early
nineteenth century that drew both Euro-Americans and Native peoples alike into its orbit. The
wealth of Comancheria was vast, and those who positioned themselves correctly had the
opportunity to tap into that wealth for themselves. At the beginning of the nineteenth century,

6 For the best sources on the federal government’s “civilization” policies, see Francis Paul Prucha,
American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1780–1834
(Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1962) and Prucha, The Great Father: The United States
Government and the American Indians (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). Historians have
also begun to explore early federal Indian policies using the framework of settler colonial theory, which
posits that settler colonial states like the U.S. based their relationships with indigenous peoples on the
“logic of elimination.” See Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,”
Communities and Settler Colonialism: Land Holding, Loss and Survival in an Interconnected World (New
York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Claudia B. Haake, The State, Removal and Indigenous Peoples in the
many Native nations (and portions of nations) moved both south and west, seeking not just the opportunity to trade with the plains nations, but to become plains nations themselves, envisioning new futures for their people. The trans-Mississippi West was alive with many possibilities, especially on the southern plains and in the places that bordered them. What the current literature has not shown is the effect of those possibilities on both the removed and the Plains Indians.⁷

These western places where eastern Native groups migrated and were removed to are an understudied facet of the Indian removal story. This dissertation brings the historiography of Indian removal into conversation with the growing historiography that demonstrates the reality of Native power on the southern plains in the early nineteenth century. John P. Bowes and Stephen Warren have recently begun expanding removal historiography, showing that removal was not just a southern story by highlighting similar experiences among Native people in the old Northwest. But removal is also a western story because Native people were not removed into a vacuum. The contexts of these western places mattered, especially the fact that the most powerful expansionist empire that eastern Indians encountered in the West was that of the Comanches, not the United States.

By focusing on the West, this dissertation joins recent work that reorients how historians think about removal and the roles actually played by the federal government and the different Native nations involved in the process of removal. In the past three to four decades, the rise of ethnohistory and the concept of borderlands history have both brought a new focus to Native

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people as vastly important historical actors in their own right. As Brian DeLay has written, “the past generation of scholarship has recast North America as a continent of dizzying and hyper-dynamic geo-political complexity prior to the twentieth century.” Historians writing from ethnohistorical and borderlands perspectives have produced many books that have entirely shifted the narrative of Native/Euro-American encounters and the story of colonization in North America, demonstrating that on the borderlands of colonial settlement, Native peoples maintained significant amounts of political and economic power well into the nineteenth century. Historians like Kathleen DuVal, Juliana Barr, James H. Merrell, Ned Blackhawk, and many others, have shown that Native nations continually negotiated for power with European empires (and later the United States) in “contested spaces” and on “Native grounds.” These and other historians have shown that Native nations were not passive victims, but sovereign actors who engaged in trade, in war, and in diplomacy, constantly navigating their way through rapidly changing contexts, often with great success.

I argue that the actions of federal officials in the West show that the U.S. government not only encouraged these early migrations, but developed policies that were designed to promote complete Indian removal from the East immediately following the Louisiana Purchase, despite the government’s lack of information about its new acquisition. Purposeful Native westward


migration occurred at the same time as the federal government was planning for complete, forced removals.\textsuperscript{10} Despite this massively important shift in how historians think and write about Native history, the story of Indian removal has remained one area where historians have found it difficult to see the continuation of a Native and Euro-American colonial power struggle. Many histories of eastern Native nations conclude at the “era of removal,” which is viewed as the moment when Native peoples, specifically from what became the American South, could no longer contest for power and the U.S. federal government permanently seized the upper hand.\textsuperscript{11} Some historians have already begun the process of expanding both the chronological and geographical boundaries used to define the “era of Indian removal,” notably Bowes and Warren. However, in emphasizing the choices made by Native people to initiate removal into the West as the option they felt was best, both Bowes and Warren have missed the fact that even though the federal government lacked power in the West, it was still deeply involved in these early migrations.


Other historians have already taken on the term “removal” itself and begun exploring the possibilities to be gained by using other terms to describe both the era in which it occurred and the process/action itself. One of the most notable examples is Sami Lakomaki’s book *Gathering Together: The Shawnee Nation through Diaspora and Nationhood*, which argues that the Shawnee people purposefully initiated movements away from their homelands as part of their political response to Euro-American expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their movements were often conducted in conjunction with bands from other Native nations that sought escape from the pressures of living near the colonial frontier; but none of these groups saw their movements west as complete divisions from the rest of their nations or as admissions of a loss of sovereignty. They moved west seeking to reestablish that sovereignty within more favorable contexts. Aside from these examples, little of the work that has arisen from the ethnohistory and borderlands schools has focused on removal, especially its impact on the powerful Native nations in the old Southwest. For information about the old Southwest, most historians have continued to rely on the work of Grant Foreman, an Oklahoma historian who wrote the majority of his books in the 1930s, and David LaVere’s 2000 book *Contrary Neighbors: Southern Plains and Removed Indians in Indian Territory*, which uncritically argues

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that the plains and removed Indians were almost always at odds with one another. There is simply little else to consult on the topic, which is a problem that this project seeks to remedy.13

By focusing on the western context of Indian removal this dissertation is also revealing of the different perceptions these groups had of their own power and about each other. More specifically, it provides space to explore how conceptions of sovereignty, removal, and civilization differed among Native people and from the federal government’s perspective on those issues. For many Native people, especially those who had moved west very early in the nineteenth century, removing provided a way to maintain sovereignty because it placed them in a new context that could give them more space to exercise that sovereignty. Acting as sovereigns in practice could mean many things, including controlling access to their defined national boundaries, making trade agreements with other Native groups, or maintaining tribal courts and schools, among other things.14

13 Grant Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1926); Foreman, Indians and Pioneers: The Story of the American Southwest Before 1830 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1930); Foreman, Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932); David LaVere, Contrary Neighbors: Southern Plains and Removed Indians in Indian Territory (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000). Foreman’s books, despite the fact that their perspective on Native history is completely outdated, are consistently cited in more recent books, like those of Hamalainen, DeLay, and Stephen Warren, because it is still the best available, and sometimes the only available, work that describes in-depth the history of Indian Territory and the Native people who moved there. LaVere’s book, although much more recent, labors under many of the same outdated attitudes about Native peoples that make Foreman’s books so difficult to read.

14 There is a significant amount of literature on global indigenous populations that explores the varied meanings of sovereignty to different Native peoples throughout history. The history of removal in the nineteenth century United States sometimes comes into conversation with that literature, but a deeper exploration of that era and the meanings removed and western Native people placed on sovereignty can provide important contributions to those discussions. See Peter Read, Belonging: Australians, Place, and Aboriginal Ownership (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Nicolas Peterson and Will Sanders, Citizenship and Indigenous Australians: Changing Conceptions and Possibilities (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Joan G. Fairweather, A Common Hunger: Land Rights in Canada and South Africa (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006); Lisa Ford, Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in American and Australia, 1788–1836 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).
Although giving up homelands in the East was not easy, Native people took seriously the federal government’s promises for land in the West, believing there was a real opportunity to secure title to lands that would truly remain theirs into the future. Thus for removing Native nations, removal was one option for attempting to maintain sovereignty, not the beginning of its end. Removing groups, and many of those who were already in the West, also had divergent views of the role that “civilization” played in the process of removal. For many Native people, adopting certain aspects of the American lifestyle was not about an abandonment of their own culture on the way to giving up their sovereignty. Rather, it was about incorporating certain aspects of American culture that they believed would help them survive and maintain their sovereignty into the future. Thus, from their perspective, pursuing “civilization” was an assertion of sovereign identity, rather than an abandonment of it, as federal officials had hoped it would be.

Because the federal government had long-term, centrally-planned removal goals, it is easy to assume, as Thomas Jefferson did when he told William Henry Harrison in 1803 that the United States needed “only to shut our hand to crush them,” that the government had the power to implement their removal goals as they desired. However, by actually looking at the federal government’s ideas about the West in the early nineteenth century and their attempts to implement removal policies this dissertation reveals that those ideas were based more on rumor and assumption than reality, and that the implementation of those policies was haphazard at best. In doing so, it revises our understanding of federal power, showing that in the absence of federal power, the Native people who migrated and were removed to the West seized the opportunity to carve out their own sovereign spaces. The federal government was still a very important player for the removed groups, because many had removed West with federal treaty promises for land
and assistance in hand. Native people did everything they could to assure that those promises were fulfilled. In addition to challenging the federal government for their sovereignty in new and more favorable contexts, removed nations also contended with the powerful Native groups who already lived in the West. Although the removed groups came with assumptions about the Plains Indians too, they were often quicker to grasp the political and economic contexts that existed in the West, and begin using those contexts to their advantage, in ways that federal officials struggled to do.

This work is not a history of removal, but rather an exploration of the various perceptions that the different groups involved in the removal process had about each other. The majority of the chapters focus on the perceptions that federal government officials had about the removing groups and the Native people who already lived in the West. This focus is partly the result of the sources that are available. The majority of the information about Native American groups in the Old Southwest during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries comes from sources written by federal government agents, making their opinions and perceptions more readily available. However, the focus on U.S. government officials is also intentional. Previously, historians like Francis Paul Prucha and Stephen J. Rockwell have emphasized that the “era” of Indian removal was one in which the federal government was able to exercise a significant amount of power and control over Native people. Investigating what federal officials actually knew about the groups that they were removing, and especially the western contexts into which they tried to removal Native people, reveals a much different picture of federal power.

However, if used carefully, these sources can also provide significant insights into Native histories that would otherwise be lost. It is possible to use federal government sources while also
taking seriously the call of Daniel K. Richter in his landmark book *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* to try to understand the world of early America as Native people saw it in their own times. The reality of the available sources sometimes means carefully parsing federal government sources in search of Native perspectives. This project is about perception (or lack thereof) and the different perspectives of the many groups who converged on the region that would come to be called “Indian Territory,” and so unlike Richter, we cannot just face east. We must instead pause at several different moments in time with different groups and look in multiple directions to try to see the world as the people who lived then saw it.

Federal agents in places like Natchitoches, Louisiana, and St. Louis, Missouri looked west, barely able to comprehend the enormity of the space that existed there or the Native people who inhabited it. Facing east from the imperial center of Comancheria, the Comanches saw the increasing numbers of Native groups converging on the edge of the plains as possible intruders on their hunting territory, but also as an intriguing opportunity to find new trade partners. The Comanches saw white settlers and federal representatives in much the same way, as potentially useful but ultimately weak allies who initially posed little threat to their dominance on the southern plains. Also facing east, the Osages and the Wichitas saw the same flood of Native migrants and Euro-Americans, but being much further east physically than the Comanches, their perspectives changed much sooner. The arrival of Native and Euro-American groups could still provide new opportunities for the Osages and the Wichitas, but in general, it quickly posed significant economic and political problems. It is more difficult to parse out the perspectives of the dozens of different eastern groups who migrated or were removed to the West in the first four
decades of the nineteenth century, for they faced many directions. Behind them to the East was warfare, disease, and the end of the lives of their nations as their ancestors had known it. In front of them to the West were large and powerful plains nations like the Comanches, who posed both a threat and an opportunity. From their new homes in the West, removed nations saw the federal government in much the same way. It faded in power as Native people went further west, posing an opportunity for removed Indians to use federal agents’ lack of knowledge and power to their own advantage, carving out their own sovereign spaces at a time when the federal government was undertaking a project that it believed would ultimately strip Native people of such national sovereignty.

Indian removal did not begin in 1830, and instead must be viewed within the context of the longer process of migration and diaspora of eastern Native peoples, who had active agency in this process, into the western borderlands. These migrations also need to be discussed in tandem with the Native political and economic developments already taking place in the West, especially the rise of the Comanche and Osage empires and the conflicts between them. It is also essential to recognize that while the federal government continued to gain the ability to assert sovereignty over Native nations east of the Mississippi River in the early nineteenth century, the same was not true in the west. Place mattered when the federal government tried to exercise control and implement its desired policies. This lack of federal control is evident through the actions not only of Native nations who established sovereign spaces in the West, but also through the actions of white Americans who pushed their settlements into the West at lightning speed. However, federal officials, both those in the East and the West, those civilian and military, rarely recognized their own lack of power over or knowledge about the true political and economic situation in the West.
Federal officials did not view the old Southwest as a borderlands space and few who became involved in the removal process made any effort to understand the past history of their government’s interactions with the Native populations who truly controlled the region. Most simply assumed a level of knowledge and control that often led to repeated failures of federal policies. By taking the context of the borderlands West into consideration, this dissertation offers a new picture of Indian removal in which the federal government appears much weaker and very uninformed, and Native nations, even those that experienced forced removal, appear as savvy political actors who worked throughout the process to maintain their status as sovereign nations.\footnote{Historians continue to debate the relative power of the federal government in the West and the amount of control it had over its citizens and the process of westward expansion. See Brian Balogh, \textit{A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and John R. Van Atta, \textit{Securing the West: Politics, Public Lands, and the Fate of the Old Republic, 1785–1850} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 45-84.}

Removal was thus a highly contested process that was framed by the lack of power exercised by the federal government in the West and the presence of several very powerful Native nations who actually controlled the southwestern borderlands. This is a story about the contest for power in the Old Southwest, and the misunderstandings that informed it, between Native nations and the federal government. Chapter One explores the deep context of the southwestern borderlands in the eighteenth century, showing how conflicts between the Comanches, the Wichitas, and the Osages shaped the region before major Native migrations from the east began and the federal government started promoting removal west of the Mississippi. In particular, the century-long intermittent war between the Osages and the Comanches over access to hunting territory on the plains created a wide swath of nearly empty
land between the Arkansas and Red Rivers that the U.S. federal government would later eagerly use as space for removing eastern Indians. Additionally, Chapter One explains the development of the trade networks that served as a powerful pull for Native groups fleeing conflict and the encroachment of white settler colonists.

In Chapter Two, the movements of those Native people who chose to move into the West and try to get away from the conflicts on the expanding American frontier are explored in detail, revealing that Native people began purposefully moving away from the Atlantic seaboard populations at least as early as the eighteenth century. These Native people came west ready to hunt, farm, and engage in many other activities, seeking space to maintain their status as sovereign nations. This chapter, and the work as a whole, purposefully focuses on the early westward migration experiences of a number of different Native groups. This work is not intended to describe in detail the removal stories of individual Native groups, but rather aims to look at their varied histories together. Doing so shows not only that their removal histories were deeply intertwined with each other and the histories of many western groups, but also that those people who experienced removal in the same era actually viewed their experiences as intertwined.

Chapter Three also describes early westward movement, except that it focuses on the early westward migrations of white Euro-Americans, especially after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. These movements are important because they reveal how little control the U.S. federal government had over its own population. Additionally, the movement of tens of thousands of white Americans into the West in the first three decades of the nineteenth century shows that one of the main arguments federal officials used to promote Indian removal (distance from the ills of
the U.S. frontier) was completely untrue. Yet few federal officials cared to admit this fact, even as they were forced to make policy changes because of the presence of illegal white colonists, because the goal of Indian removal was considered too important.

Chapter Four explores how the continued arrivals of more Native and white people in the West complicated the federal government’s efforts to assert sovereignty over the space it had purchased in 1803. Although all the officials appointed to act as federal representatives in the West agreed that the United States owned Louisiana, different officials went about asserting that sovereignty in different ways. For example, U.S. agent John Sibley tried to use trade and diplomacy to win the allegiance and friendship of western groups, developing relationships with the Comanches and the Wichitas that would significantly affect Native perspectives on the federal government and its removal efforts well into the 1830s, even though U.S. officials largely forgot Sibley’s efforts. However, other federal officials like William Clark tried to assert U.S. sovereignty by demanding land cessions from western groups, trying to gain more literal control of western spaces that could be used as removal locations for eastern Natives.

Chapter Five expands on the latter idea, using the Cherokees and the Choctaws as the primary examples to show that federal officials planned for and implemented removal policies well before the 1830s. “Civilizing” Native people was an important component of federal efforts to control Native populations, but I argue in chapter five that “civilization” was always deeply connected to the idea of removal and therefore it does not make sense to think of “removal” and “civilization” as separate U.S. policies implemented at different times, as many historians have previously done. However, even though the federal government had long been implementing civilization and removal policies, and increasingly had the power to move Native nations out of
the American South, that did not mean that the U.S. government exercised sovereignty over the places where it was removing Native people to in the West. This lack of knowledge and control, while allowing space for Native assertions of sovereignty, was also sometimes detrimental to Native groups who were depending on certain federal promises as part of their efforts to maintain sovereignty.

Chapter Six highlights the historical amnesia with which federal officials usually operated, exploring federal efforts during the 1830s to gain control over southwestern Native populations when U.S. officials came to fear that powerful groups like the Comanches were hostile toward Americans and the removing Indians. If true, such Native hostility could upset the entire removal project. In 1832, a three-man commission was appointed to go to Indian Territory, find the plains Natives, show them the superiority of the United States, and convince them to not attack the removed nations. However, the commissioners spent most of their time arguing among themselves and after two years had accomplished little. Federal officials did not realize that because of past interactions with Americans and the federal government that had been facilitated by John Sibley (and new developments on the central plains in the 1830s), the Comanches, the Wichitas, and other plains groups were actually eager to reestablish connections with Americans and saw possibilities for profit in the presence of the removed Nations on their eastern border.

The culmination of the federal government’s efforts to assert control over the southwest, a treaty signed at a place called Camp Holmes in the summer of 1835, is discussed in Chapter Seven. As a treaty designed to assert federal control over the plains Natives, the treaty was a colossal failure. However, the interactions between the removed and plains Natives that the federal government facilitated in this treaty-making effort was massively important for
developing close diplomatic and economic relationships between the many Native groups who had just become neighbors. The available sources allow for a more significant exploration of Native perspectives on the meaning of sovereignty and removal. The aftermath of the treaty negotiations and the federal government’s continued lack of understanding about the relationships it had helped develop is explored in the final chapter, showing that although removed Native nations suffered greatly, they did not completely lose their sovereignty. This is an important part of the removal story, because it shows that departure from the East was not the end. Native people maintained sovereignty in the West, while the federal government remained weak and practically unaware of its own lack of power.

Native American history in the nineteenth century is ultimately a story about the negotiation between Native nations and Euro-American states for sovereign spaces. I seek to bring together the stories of many different Native nations’ experiences of removal and diaspora into the southwest, recognizing that while all of them experienced problems related to U.S. territorial expansion, they all responded differently, with great variety even existing within single nations. This decision to explore many Native histories together is also partly in response to the historiography of Indian removal up to this point, which has tended to focus on one Indian group at a time. This is usually done because of space and time limitations, but some detail must be left out to look more broadly at nineteenth century Native history, to understand the multitude of removals, migrations, and diasporas of the Native people who lived through them.

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When viewed through a much broader lens of time, Native history in the first half of the
nineteenth century is one of much loss and destruction, but not one of pre-determined decline.
Native nations constantly negotiated their sovereignty with the United States through a variety of
means, achieving some remarkable successes before the of borderlands spaces where power
could be contested had almost completely disappeared, leading to even greater political and
economic struggles for Native peoples trying to make new lives in the West. But that does not
mean Native peoples gave up the fight for their sovereignty. Borderlands spaces may not exist in
the same way any more, but the negotiation between Native nations and the federal government
continues today. My story describes just one portion of that ongoing negotiation.
To fully understand the history of how removal developed as a federal policy and how Native people in the trans-Mississippi West affected the outcome of those policies, one must begin in the colonial era and reclaim the context that U.S. government agents did not have when they began trying to implement removal. The region sometimes called the “old Southwest” was truly a crossroads during the era in which European empires fought each other for imagined control of the North American continent. In reality, those European powers did not function much like empires as they struggled to control Native nations like the Comanches and the Osages, who had the economic and political power to actually operate in an imperial manner. In fact, it was that economic power that first pulled both European and Native traders searching for profit into the region. As the Comanches and Osages became more powerful throughout the eighteenth century (and became bitter rivals), the economic possibilities of the trans-Mississippi West began to attract many Native people into their orbit. The West was a logical and appealing alternative to the problems related Native groups faced east of the Mississippi. Initially, Native newcomers from the East were either in small enough numbers or could provide an important enough resource (like access to trade goods) that they did not upset the balance of power between the Osages and the Comanches. But eventually, especially with the arrival of the “Old Settler” Cherokees at the end of the eighteenth century, that dynamic would begin to change, threatening the Osages’ position as keepers of the gateway to the plains and leaving them vulnerable to the Comanches.
Louis F. Burns, the most prolific Osage historian, conceived of the Osages as an “empire” in his monolithic book *A History of the Osage People* in 1989, long before describing Native peoples in imperial terms became trendy. In 2008, Pekka Hamalainen and Brian DeLay introduced readers to the idea that the Comanches could also be conceived of using imperial terminology, aptly demonstrating how the actions of the Comanches shaped the development of the southwest for decades by halting Spanish imperial dreams, devastating Mexico with brutal raids, and preventing American expansion while developing a wildly successful economy based on trading horses, mules, and buffalo hides.¹

Thus describing the Comanches and the Osages in imperial terms is not new—but what historians have yet to do is to talk about these two empires in relation to each other, rather than just Spain or the United States. Historians have also not explored how the relationship between the Comanche and Osage empires affected the forced and voluntary migrations of Native people into the trans-Mississippi West. The economic wealth of the Comanche nation pulled some Native nations to the West, while the conflicts between the Osages and Comanches, and the Osages and removing tribes, created problems that threatened to push back the federal government’s removal plans. The wealth created by these empires also attracted American traders, whose actions often put them at odds with the plans of their government. This chapter explains the context in which the beginning of the United States’ Indian removal policies and practices took place. Indian removal was a process, and it had much to do with place—not only

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the homelands that were wrenched away, but also the borderlands places where Native people were going.

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The Osages were themselves early migrants to the trans-Mississippi West, having been pushed along with other Dhegiha Siouan peoples across the river in the late seventeenth century. As Kathleen DuVal describes in *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*, they fled the onslaught of the expanding Iroquoian peoples, who used weapons acquired from Dutch traders on the east coast to launch devastating raids on groups in the Ohio River region. Thus, like many Native groups before and after them, the Osages used migration as a survival strategy to escape a more powerful, expanding polity. After settling in what is now the state of Missouri, the Osages quickly become the dominant Native force in the mid-continent.²

There is little information about the interior of the North American continent before the late seventeenth century besides documents describing Hernando de Soto’s expedition through the southeast and across the Mississippi River between 1541 and 1543. A significant number of accounts of that expedition have survived, although they vary widely in quality and believability.³ Historians usually rely on the work of archeologists to try to fill in the gaps between 1543 and 1673, when French explorers Louis Jolliet and Jacques Marquette traveled south on the Mississippi River from the Great Lakes to the mouth of the Arkansas River,

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reaching the heart of the mid-continent. The world described by members of de Soto’s expedition looked very different from the one described by Jolliet and Marquette. New groups, including the Osages, filled the pages of the Frenchmen’s accounts; other groups appeared in different places or with obviously different strengths and weaknesses than before. The trans-Mississippi West that Jolliet and Marquette found, especially the hilly, wooded swath of territory that lay between the river and Great Plains, was a dynamic, contested borderlands space that Native migrants were attracted to for a variety of reasons. These included the favorable climate and good hunting for woodland animals like bear, deer, and beaver, as well as easy access to the giants of the plains, the bison. Jolliet and Marquette met the Osages, who had probably just arrived in the west sometime in the previous decade.

While the Osages adapted to their new trans-Mississippi homes and the changes that were being wrought by French contact with the region, a great nation to their west, today called the Wichitas, was already confronting some of the harsher realities of European exploration. In the mid-sixteenth century, the five major Wichita bands—the Taovayas, Iscanis, Kichais, Tawakonis, and Guichitas—were spread across the eastern Great Plains, living in large villages along the rivers that run through what is now south central Kansas and central and eastern Oklahoma. They


5 There is an interesting debate about whether or not the de Soto expedition encountered the Quapaws during their journey. There is some possible evidence for this, but if true, it throws a wrench into the theory that Dhegihan Siouan groups migrated west because of Iroquois aggression. See Michael P. Hoffman, “Identification of Ethnic Groups Contacted by the de Soto Expedition in Arkansas,” in Young and Hoffman, eds., *The Expedition of Hernando de Soto*.

were agriculturalists whose crops thrived in the region’s rich soils, supporting a population of as many as 200,000 people. Trade was also an important aspect of early Wichita society, and archaeological evidence suggests that the Wichitas had well-developed trade networks with both the mound-building Mississippian cultures to their east (which were declining by the mid-sixteenth century) and with the Pueblo peoples who lived to the West, in what is now New Mexico and Colorado.  

It was because of those western trade links that the Wichitas first encountered the Spanish. The infamous guide for Francisco Vasquez de Coronado’s search for new cities of gold in 1541, who is called “Turk” in most accounts, was probably a Wichita man who had traveled to New Mexico to trade. When Turk heard about the search for these cities of gold, he told Coronado that such places existed out on the plains. Turk might have been describing his own villages or the impressive mound cities of the Mississippi River region, confused about what the Spanish meant. Or he might have simply have lied. Regardless, Turk’s stories brought the Spanish into first contact with the Wichitas, with disastrous consequences for Turk when no gold was found among the Wichitas. Unimpressed with the treeless, seemingly empty plains, the Spanish stayed away for another sixty years, until 1593, when more Spanish explorers again made brief contact with the Wichitas. Besides the Onate expedition in 1598 there was very little direct contact between Europeans and the Wichitas for the next century.

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However, as a result of those fleeting encounters, the Wichitas had been exposed to three new things: guns, horses, and disease, all of which “forced [them] to alter their lifestyle dramatically.” By the time the French arrived among them in 1719, the Wichitas had already lost about ninety percent of their population to diseases like typhus and smallpox. They had acquired some horses, although not nearly as many as they wanted, and they had moved further southeast, away from the central plains, into more concentrated village groupings. The Wichitas’ situation was made more precarious by the growing strength of the Apache nation to their southwest and the increasingly-well-armed Osages to their northeast. Even more potentially troublesome was the rise of yet another expanding group, the Comanches.

The Numunu first entered the written record as “Comanches” in a 1706 Spanish government report from the province of New Mexico, the name “Comanche,” apparently derived from a Shoshone word meaning “snake.” The people who would be called Comanches had broken away from their Shoshone relatives sometime in the late seventeenth century, going south and leaving the interior of the Rocky Mountain region. As they moved south, they allied with the Ute peoples of northern New Mexico, and then encountered Spanish colonists and their horses. It was the beginning of “a profound material revolution” for the Comanches. It was also a rapid revolution, beginning over the course of a single generation, and solidifying with the arrival of

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11 Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire*, p. 25.
the next. Comanche society evolved from semi-sedentary and horticultural into one that was completely nomadic and reliant on horses and buffalo for sustenance.\textsuperscript{12}

The Osages had probably first acquired horses in the 1680s, nearly the same time as the Comanches were also gaining reliable access to them.\textsuperscript{13} Anthropologist Garrick A. Bailey has claimed that “the horse had only limited value in Osage subsistence and failed to revolutionize Osage culture,” but that is certainly not true. Comparing the result of the Osages’ acquisition of horses to that of the Comanches can make it seem like the horse had little impact on Osage society. Horses much more \textit{visibly} impacted Comanche society, since the Osages did not choose to become nomadic hunters (at least not until the mid-nineteenth century). However, horses gave the Osages the mobility that was necessary for them to expand in the rapid and sustained way that they did in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{14} Hunting patterns changed drastically once the Osages had horses. By the late eighteenth century, they had developed a seasonal life cycle that was centered around two major hunts. The first usually began in June and ended in August, while the second began in September and lasted until December, sometimes beyond, depending on its success. In other words, Osage life came to revolve around hunting practices that were only

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\textsuperscript{14} Bailey also quite disturbingly assumes that the Spanish were actually able to halt the Osage captive trade once they took over the Louisiana Territory from the French. See Garrick, “Osage,” p. 477.
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possible because of the new transportation option that horses made available to them.\textsuperscript{15}

Additionally, the clash between the Osages and the Comanches was so long and bitter in part because they were equally matched rivals who had both mastered the arts of warfare and buffalo hunting conducted on horseback. The rise of these two Native groups to dominance needs to be discussed together to truly understand either of them and the borderlands spaces that the U.S. federal government would come to consider as “empty” places available for removing Indians.\textsuperscript{16}

Horses also allowed the Osages to become participants in the commercial hide trade that the French brought to the region. Joliet and Marquette’s successful visit to the Mississippi Valley set off a wave of additional French involvement as \textit{voyageurs} (independent fur traders) realized the commercial potential of the region. The decision to participate in the trading opportunities offered by the French was the beginning of a period of rapid Osage expansion as they sought to obtain new goods, especially guns, from Europeans and other Native groups, like the Quapaws,

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\textsuperscript{15} Garrick A. Bailey, “Osage,” p. 480. Kathleen DuVal, \textit{The Native Ground}: “The Osage began the years in April or May when they cleared fields and planted their crops along the river and creek bottoms near their permanent villages. Horticulture was an individual or household activity carried out primarily by women. The fields were tended only until the plants had grown large enough not to be choked out by weeds. In June, after the plants were established, preparations began for the summer bison hunt.”
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\textsuperscript{16} Ives Goddard, “The Languages of the Plains: Introduction,” DeMaille, ed., \textit{Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 13, Part 1}, p. 67. There are only tantalizing hints about the deep extent of Comanche/Osage contact, like the “unusual” borrowing of certain words in their very unrelated languages, such as that for \textit{bear}. Goddard explains that the languages of the Plains groups were some of the most diverse considering the commonalities that were found among their cultures. There is good evidence that most groups did not learn each other’s languages, often instead relying on the sign language of the Plains. The Osage and Comanche languages were descended from different language families, thus making the borrowing even more unusual. Some of this borrowing was also likely the result of their friendly interactions from 1835 onward, discussed in chapter 8.
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who already traded with Europeans. Hunting, and the prestige that successful hunts had long brought to men in Osage society, allowed the Osages to easily adapt to the large-scale commercial trading that Europeans desired. In addition to furs, the Osages began trading captives obtained through warfare who were trafficked as slaves by the French, often to distant Caribbean sugar plantations. Selling captives was a significant departure from Osage cultural norms. According to Louis F. Burns, the Osages did not keep slaves as such. They had a long history of taking captives, but typically those captives, (especially men) were either killed soon after their capture or incorporated as members of Osage society.

By the 1690s, the Osages were traveling widely to make contact with French traders at posts like Kaskaskaia and Cahokia. The Osages had long lived in small, politically divided band groups, but the development of trade connections with the French precipitated the beginning of a long pattern of severe political factionalism that characterized Osage society up through the nineteenth century. Their villages on the Osage River were just too far off the main trade routes from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and so a group that was sizable, despite the “Little Osage” name that they acquired, moved northeast and established villages on the Missouri River. The Osages would only continue to splinter into more politically distinct groups

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18 Louis F. Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 2nd Edition, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004). Some of the captives were probably traded to other Native groups. The Osages’ willingness to trade to the French indicates that trading captives was not a totally new practice when the French arrived.

from this point on, a centuries-long and devastating process that would deprive them of the political and cultural unity that was one of the main tools Native groups had at their disposal to face the challenges brought on by European contact.

The Osages were protective of their alliance with French traders, and attempted to prevent *voyageurs* from traveling further west through all possible means. Additionally, they attacked nearby Native groups to prevent them from seeking access to French trade goods. This was the beginning of the Osages’ brutal raids on the depleted Wichita population that had been forced to strategically reposition itself along the Arkansas, Cimarron, and Canadian rivers in what would become the heart of Indian Territory just over a century later.\(^{20}\) The Osages increased these raids the more they traded with the French, not only to prevent the Wichita bands from gaining access to French trade, but also to have a reliable source for the captives that the French wanted in exchange for guns and other goods.

While the Osages were developing relationships with their new European trading partners and wreaking havoc on Wichita settlements, the Comanches were beginning to exploit the captive trade that already thrived between Native groups near Spanish settlements in New Mexico. As they moved east out of the Rocky Mountains and onto the Great Plains, following the bison with their newly acquired horse herds, the Comanches saw that even greater opportunities for trade existed on the plains. The old east-west corridors that had first brought the Spanish out onto the Great Plains to meet with the Wichita were still in existence, although not nearly as well-traveled as they had been before the Wichitas rapid population decline. The Comanches began tapping “into an ancient, vigorous trading niche” that “had for centuries been

a major entrepot of trade, a transition point where plains hunters bartered hides and meat for maize and other village products.” This “Plains-Pueblo exchange system” had thrived because of the “complementary resources” that the peoples of each region were able to access. The Comanches’ growing specialization in bison hunting led them to continue that trend, because they would need access to other important sources of nutrition that horticultural tribes like the Wichitas and the Pueblos of eastern New Mexico could provide. Hamalainen believes that early in the eighteenth century the Comanches may also have already been aware that French traders, another potential source for the metal goods and weapons they had only been able to acquire in small amounts in New Mexico, were operating on the eastern edge of the plains. There is evidence that by the first decade of the eighteenth century, some voyageurs had bypassed the Osage trade blockade by traveling onto the plains from the south, through the newly-established colony of Louisiana, and up the Red River corridor.

The histories of these tribes, the Osages, the Wichitas, and the Comanches, became even more entangled as French traders became more bold in their attempts to expand trade into the West. Many traders had grand ambitions of reaching Santa Fe and establishing trading relationships with Native groups who lived along the route. However, it would be incorrect to describe French trading policy during this time as in any way centrally planned. There were so many independent and illegal traders operating from both Canada and Louisiana that it was

21 Hamalainen, Comanche Empire, p. 29.
23 Hamalainen cites only a diary of a Spanish government official as evidence, but F. Todd Smith describes the establishment of a permanent French trading post at Biloxi in 1699, as well as clear evidence of French trade connections with the Caddo people in Louisiana around that time as well. See Smith, The Wichita Indians, p. 19.
impossible for French officials to regulate the trade. In fact, it seems obvious with the benefit of hindsight that these French traders were doing themselves no favors by seeking additional trading partners on the plains, because those groups’ abilities to fulfill French trading needs were significantly impaired by attacks from Osage war parties armed with French guns. However, the French wanted to expand west without compromising their very profitable trade with the Osages, despite Osage attempts to prevent it, so the obvious option was to use the new Louisiana colony to bypass the Osages to the south.

This attempt officially began in 1714, with the founding of a trading post at Natchitoches on the southernmost portion of the Red River in Louisiana. French traders like Jean Baptiste Le Moyne (Sieur de Bienville) and Louis Juchereau de St. Denis developed successful trade routes in the region, especially with the local Caddo Nation. The Caddos, some bands of which had previously lived closer to the Arkansas River, had also become the targets of Osage raids and had moved south into Texas for safety. They were eager for new trade alliances to help combat the onslaught. An official trading post seemed like the best way for the French to capitalize on these opportunities. However, the Louisiana colony was a money pit, and in 1717 management of the colony was turned over to the Company of the Indies, a private trading enterprise. In 1718, the company granted a license to Jean Baptise Benard de la Harpe to trade at the Kadohadacho villages on the lower Red River. La Harpe’s venture into the west was an important moment.

The detailed accounts that he left describing his experiences on the Red and Arkansas Rivers

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25 The Kadohadacho were one of the most powerful remaining bands of the Caddo, who were, according to F. Todd Smith, “linguistic kin of the Wichita.”
provide valuable insights into the Native political dynamic of the area at the very beginning of regular French trade with tribes there. Departing from New Orleans in December 1718, La Harpe quickly reached the Cadoo villages that were just north of Natchitoches and began constructing what was supposed to be a permanent fort at the village of one Caddo band called the Nasonis.26

Eager to establish trade ties, the Nasonis welcomed him heartily. La Harpe planned to use the fort as a base from which to launch trading and exploratory parties further west.27 He was particularly eager to get information about the trading activities of the Spanish among the groups west of the Caddos, the most important of which la Harpe believed to be the “Cancy,” “Padouca,” and the “Panis.” These were very likely the Apaches, Comanches, and Pawnees (or possibly the Wichitas), although the exact identity of these groups (and who la Harpe actually believed them to be) is debatable.28 Soon after his arrival, La Harpe convinced two Nasoni guides to take him to the northern location where they had reportedly seen “some metallic stones.”29 La Harpe probably hoped the stones were a precious metal of some kind, like the gold that the Spanish had infuriatingly found so much of in the New World. His quest to find out the answer was stalled, however, because the Nasoni guides became utterly terrified of being

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27 The exact location of the Nasoni village and La Harpe’s post is not known, but archaeologists are certain is was somewhere very near present-day Texarkana, Texas. See Odell, *La Harpe’s Post*, pp. 1-2.


attacked by an Osage raiding party. La Harpe tried to brush off the guides’ concerns, but once the group saw the campfires of another party nearby, “it was not possible to reassure [them]” and La Harpe was forced to turn back.\textsuperscript{30}

However, La Harpe seems to have learned a lesson as a result of the incident. The Osages whose campfires they had seen stole two of the Frenchmen’s horses, forcing some members of the party to walk all the way back to the Nasoni village. It would not be until June that La Harpe was able to explore the rest of the region, when he sent a man named Du Rivage with a much larger guard of eighteen men to explore further up the Red River, along what is now the border of Texas and Oklahoma. By the end of the month, Du Rivage’s party returned with good news. They had met a party consisting of Hasinais (another Caddoan band), Kichais, Wacos, and Tonkawas (a Texas-based tribe often allied with the Caddos and the Wichitas). That large group was just returning from a successful raid on the Apaches, who were barely hanging on to their villages on the upper Red River because of the Comanches’ increased assaults on their villages. The evidence found in La Harpe’s journal suggests that by this time the Wichitas may have already been cooperating with the Comanches against the Apaches. Ecstatic to meet the French, the Kichais told Du Rivage and La Harpe about a Tawakoni village to the north, where they would find plenty of people willing to trade.\textsuperscript{31}

La Harpe departed on August 11, 1719 for the Tawakoni village, which was probably on the Arkansas River, near present-day Muskogee, Oklahoma, but historians and archaeologists

\textsuperscript{30} ibid

\textsuperscript{31} Hamalainen and other Comanche historians are pretty dismissive of a positive relationship between those tribes at this early time period. The Wichita bands and the Tonkawa may, of course, simply have been taking advantage of the Comanches’ assault on the Apaches to conduct their own raids on their historic enemies.
have also argued that the village was slightly further south and west, on the Canadian River. He hoped that “making an alliance with them . . . [would facilitate] penetrating into New Mexico and the nation of the Padoucas.” La Harpe had grand ambitions, and during his months at the Caddo villages had learned about the interesting commercial opportunities that existed among the Comanches (or Padoucas, as he knew them). Indeed, while he spent about three weeks traveling toward the Tawakoni’s village, he took note of places like “a great prairie” and “a cross road,” which he believed (or was told by his guides) served as gateways into the plains and New Mexico. The party was easily able to supply themselves with food by killing buffalo and other game along the way, further increasing La Harpe’s positive impression of the region.

La Harpe’s party arrived at the Tawakoni village on September 3, only briefly delayed by meeting another Osage raiding party. They found a thriving village with at least 6,000 residents. Perhaps as many as a thousand more people arrived once news of the Frenchmen’s visit spread across the region. The Tawakonis and other gathered bands held lavish ceremonies, indicating the importance with which they viewed the relationship they hoped to establish with La Harpe and other French traders. They gave La Harpe a captive Apache boy, regretting they did not have more available. Like the Osages, most Wichita bands ritually killed captives unless those captives were traded away. The fact that the Tawakonis assumed La Harpe would want captives

32 Compare the maps in Smith, ed., “Account of the Journey,” p. 532 to Anna Lewis and Joseph Thoburn, eds., “La Harpe’s First Expedition in Oklahoma, 1718–1719,” Chronicles of Oklahoma 2, (December 1924), p. 342. F. Todd Smith, whose more recent scholarship is more reliable, believes that the village was on the Arkansas River. La Harpe’s descriptions of his route are imprecise and difficult to trace on a modern map.


34 ibid, p. 381
indicates that the Tawakonis had probably encountered itinerant French traders prior to La Harpe’s arrival.

The Osages were not the only group who were alarmed by the development of French trading relationships with the Caddos and the Wichitas. By a coincidence so amazing that it could not have been terribly uncommon, while La Harpe was at the Tawakoni village a Chickasaw trader arrived with goods he had obtained from British traders on the east coast. Surprised and probably upset that his arrival was usurped by the much more impressive French and their large amount of presents, the unnamed Chickasaw trader quickly left, likely reporting the presence of the French to his British suppliers. This Chickasaw man’s presence at the Tawakoni village in 1719 indicates how deeply British trading for Native slaves affected the trans-Mississippi West and also how connected eastern and western trade networks were in the early eighteenth century.35

At the same time that they sought new allies among the Wichitas, the French continued to try maintaining their relationship with the jealous Osages, even though many French traders and officials found them to be, in La Harpe’s words, “perfidious.”36 To that end, the French sent Etienne de Veniard (Sieur de Bourgamont) to build a new post called Fort Orleans near the Missouri River. Bourgamont was a well-traveled man who was involved in various colonization schemes and had lived among the Missouri Indians for years before receiving orders to construct

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35 Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade*, pp. 128-132. These efforts by the French greatly alarmed the Spanish, who feared that the French were cutting off Florida from their other North American colonies. The Chickasaw trader probably informed his British suppliers about the presence of the French among the Osage in the west. At the same time, the French were also trying to woo the Chickasaw away from their British allies. For more on these Indian trade networks, see Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 13-45.

the new post. French officials had realized it was would be easier to involve the Osages in their attempts to make alliances with western nations like the Comanches, thus creating a chain of friendly Indians leading all the way to Santa Fe, which remained the ultimate French goal during this period. The large peace conference that Bourgmont held in central Kansas involved not only the Osages, Comanches, and Missouris, but the Kansas, Omahas, Otoes, and others. Most of the groups in attendance, including the Comanches, “accepted peace with one another and all solemnly promised to keep their word,” while other groups, especially the Osages, “were more vague” about their intentions to keep the peace. This first recorded attempt by the French to broker peace between the plains tribes and the woodland tribes west of the Mississippi is rarely mentioned, probably because it was ultimately unsuccessful, but it is important nonetheless for showing the strength of the Comanche and Osage trade networks. The French wanted to be a part of both—they also actually recognized that success in the West was connected to peace between the Osages and the Comanches. The same would be true two hundred years later when the United States began attempting to assert sovereignty over the region.

Meanwhile, the Comanches continued their conquest of the southern plains in the 1720s, fighting a brutal war of attrition against the Apaches. The Apaches, who had been remarkably successful on the Plains, forcing Wichita bands to move away from prime hunting grounds on the Upper Arkansas and raiding Caddo villages to the east, were in serious trouble. As the Comanches moved in, they sometimes fought the Wichitas, but quickly realized the value of an alliance with the Apaches’ long-time enemies. The Wichitas thus needed French weapons to fight not only their Osage enemies, but also to capitalize on the weakened state of the Apaches. Their

reception of La Harpe in 1719 makes much more sense in the context of Comanche expansion. The Osages’ desperation to keep the French trade exclusive to themselves also makes much more sense—how could they know that the Comanches did not plan further expansion to the east after they expelled the Apaches from the Plains? The Comanches’ decision to ally with the Wichitas probably made the Osages even more concerned about the future.  

By 1723, Comanche attacks had forced the Apaches to leave the Arkansas Valley entirely. A decade later, the Comanches had finally obtained enough horses and enough space to make the transition to full-blown nomadism complete. After they pushed out the Apaches, the Comanches briefly reestablished their always-tenuous commercial ties to Spanish markets in New Mexico and began a period of rapid population increase. The boundary of Comanche territory became established as roughly the 98th meridian—a line that went right through the middle of what would become Indian Territory, essentially straddling the Cross Timbers region that divided the Great Plains from the woodland prairie homes of the Osages.

Although much less exposed to Apache raids after the 1720s, the Tawakonis, Taovayas, Guichitas, and other Wichita bands who lived on the border between the plains and the Cross Timbers in the 1730s and 1740s suffered even more devastating raids as Osage access to French weapons increased. The large Tawakoni village that La Harpe had visited in 1719 was abandoned by the 1730s because of Osage attacks. Some of those Tawakonis briefly relocated southwest to the Canadian River, before quickly moving on to join the Kichais who lived even further south.

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39 Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire*, p. 35.
40 Hamalainen cites French observers of Comanche camps in the 1740s and 1750s, p. 39.
on the Red River. It is unclear exactly when the Taovayas and Guichitas abandoned their Verdigris River villages (which were even further east than the Tawakoni village), but by the early 1740s, they had joined with other Guichita and Isacani villages on Deer Creek, a small river that emptied into the Arkansas, at least fifty miles to the west. F. Todd Smith believes that the residents of this combined village grouping were collectively called the “Panis Piques,” a term often found in French documents referring to Native people of that region. Smith also notes, “By the late 1740s, perhaps as many as thirty Frenchmen a year were traveling by boat to the Panis Pique villages on Deer Creek.” The regular arrival of French traders at these villages was one of the main reasons that the Wichitas were eager for the alliance that the Comanches offered around 1746. The more access the Wichitas had to the horses, hides, and captives that the French wanted, the better their trading relationships would be. However, this commerce with the French also made the Panis Pique villages targets of Osage raids, and they would not be able to remain on Deer Creek for long.

Neither the Comanches nor the Osages followed through on the promises of peace they had made at Bourgmont’s council, instead maintaining a standoff, with the 98th meridian becoming a buffer zone between the two expanding empires. The Osages had achieved their goal of access to the hunting grounds on the plains, while the Comanches had inherited the Apaches’ conflict with their northern Pawnee neighbors, who also had fairly reliable access to weapons from British and French traders operating out of Canada. Arapahoes were also troubling the

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42 F. Todd Smith, The Wichita Indians, p. 25. The identity of the “Panis Piques” has been the cause of much debate among historians, but Smith seems to think that the term unquestionably referred to the people of these three very important villages, which would reappear several times during the rest of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.

Comanches from the northwest. Thus by the 1740s, the Comanches were fighting a three-pronged war, a fact that necessitated dramatic diplomatic changes, the first of which was an official pact in 1746 with the Wichitas. As mutual enemies of the Osages and with access to different but complementary resources, the alliance proved useful to both sides.

This was a big moment for the Wichita bands, the Taovayas especially, and the beginning of their history as intermediaries on the eastern trade routes into and out of the plains. They not only received goods from the French and Comanches, but they also guided French traders directly into Comanche territory, a practice that utterly terrified Spanish officials who still believed that they had some sort of imperial control in North America. By the late 1740s, Osage attacks on the Wichita villages and Comanche hunting parties were so intense that those two groups decided it was in their best interest to stop fighting the Pawnees and draw them into an anti-Osage alliance.

In 1751, the Wichitas called on their new Comanche and Pawnee allies to help them respond to a particularly brutal attack that the Osages had committed on one of their villages. Together, the three tribes struck a major blow to the Osages, killing twenty-two Osage chiefs. Another battle was fought the following summer, when the Wichitas and Comanches attacked the Osages during their summer hunt. Both sides lost a significant number of warriors. These counterattacks caused the Osages to stop hunting so far west and also briefly halted raids on

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44 Hamalainen speculates that this alliance was “brokered” by French traders who hoped to expand their own commercial opportunities in the west. *Comanche Empire*, p. 43.

45 Hamalainen writes, “In 1748 Spanish officials were alarmed to learn that thirty-three Frenchmen had visited the Comanches northeast of Taos and purchased mules with ‘plenty of muskets.’” (p. 43)


47 Smith, *The Wichita Indians*, p. 27.
Wichita villages. The region around the 98th meridian became a neutral ground between the two empires where few hunters or traders were willing to venture.

Unfortunately for the Taovayas, because of their location close to the Osages’ homeland, they ended up bearing the brunt of the retaliation that eventually followed these joint attacks. The Taovayas’ large villages were easy targets, and the Osages raided them ruthlessly, much the same way that the Comanches raided Spanish settlements. Osage raids, coupled with a crippling attack of smallpox in 1751, led the Wichitas to abandon the Deer Creek villages by the mid-1750s. The Taovayas, Guichitas, and Iscanis finally joined the other Wichita bands and settled on the banks of the Red River, nearly 200 miles south of their previous location. They hoped it would be both far enough away to discourage Osage attacks and close enough to the French trade traffic from Louisiana up the Red River to allow them to maintain the access to goods they needed to supply the Comanches. The three villages that were established there (two on the north bank and one on the south) were some “of the landmark villages of the Southern Plains for the next half century.”

Just a few decades later, when officials from the U.S. government were trying to implement their removal policies, they often complained that the Osages were the most troublesome of all the western groups that they encountered. What those frustrated officials did not realize is that the federal government partially owed the possibility of removing Indian populations to the Southwest to the Osages, whose devastating raids on the expansive Wichita

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48 Smith, *The Wichita Indians*, p. 27. Smith sees this, and really all events in Wichita history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as part of a declension narrative. For example, he ends and/or begins nearly every chapter with statements like this one: “Although the Wichitas would try to overcome the changes introduced into their world, in the future the tribe’s fortunes would slowly but surely plummet.” (p. 34)
villages had almost completely cleared out the Arkansas and Canadian River valleys, leaving a large, mostly empty swath of land between the Mississippi River and the border with Spain. The Comanches’ conquest of the Apaches and their ongoing clashes with the Osages also kept the region relatively empty through the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the federal government purchased the Louisiana Territory and began trying to implement its Indian removal project.

In the 1740s and the 1750s, the Comanches began expanding into Texas. From there, they launched more raids into Spanish settlements, increasing their already massive horse herds. The move south also provided them with more space for their rapidly growing population and kept them close to the Wichita bands that had been forced to move south. Alarmed by these developments, the Spanish and their Lipan Apache allies launched an extremely unsuccessful attack on the main Taovaya village on the Red River in 1758. The attack demonstrated the depth of the Spaniards’ fear about the extent and success of the Comanche-Wichita trade network with the French.

After France ceded the Louisiana Territory to Spain following the Seven Years’ War, Spain tried to exercise its supposed sovereignty over the region to close the French-Wichita-Comanche trade networks and limit the supply of weapons available to the Comanches and Osages. However, they were were wildly unsuccessful at doing so. One could, perhaps, sum up all Spanish colonization efforts north of Mexico as wildly unsuccessful. Disruptions caused by the departure of government-sanctioned French traders in Louisiana coincided with a shift by the

49 Smith says the attack was in 1759. This could be a typo, or is there a real debate about the year of the attack?

50 Kavanagh, Comanche Political History, pp. 79-83.
Comanches to their northern border, where they found they made fantastic profits by selling from their vast herds to the “chronically horse-poor” tribes of the northern plains, like the Pawnees, Cheyennes, and Kiowas.51

Trading activities on the Red River briefly declined, putting the Wichitas in a precarious position vis-a-vis their access to weapons to fight the Osages, who remained well-supplied because of their closer access to the Mississippi River and contraband British traders there.52 The Wichitas needed as many weapons as possible to defend themselves. The Comanches had aided them in the 1750s battles with the Osages, but the raids on Wichita settlements continued. Yet the Comanches were willing to let those raids continue because they had other sources of trade and were unwilling to go out of their way to defend the Wichitas or make additional attacks in Osage territory unless absolutely necessary. With a vast commercial network that extended in all directions, those who had nothing to trade or contribute became marginalized members of an increasingly Comanche-dominated world. Caddoan bands like the Hasinais and the Kadohadachos, who had been part of the early Wichita and Comanche alliance against the Apaches, began to fade into obscurity, lacking the goods or the connections that would have allowed them to remain politically relevant. This fact in part explains the very hospitable welcome that the Caddos and Wichitas extended to U.S. government officials when they arrived in the region after 1803.

By the late 1760s the Comanches had become frustrated with the middleman role that the Wichitas were playing in the contraband firearms trade from Louisiana. The Comanches felt that

51 quote is from Hamalainen, Comanche Empire, p. 71
52 Smith describes them as “British traders who swarmed West,” The Wichita Indians, p. 44.
the Wichitas were being too stingy, charging high prices and keeping many of the guns that they received from French, English (and, increasingly, American) traders for themselves. The Comanches seemed to have little sympathy for the fact that the Wichitas had always been in a very exposed position relative to the Osages. The Comanches’ frustration may also have been fueled by some of the Wichita bands’ attempts to make an alliance with the Spanish, which began in earnest when the Wichitas started to feel economically marginalized in the Comanche-dominated plains trade networks.53

In the fall of 1760, Tawakoni and Taovaya chiefs had begun meeting with Spanish representatives at Nacogdoches. Over the next few years, they discussed various aspects of a peace agreement, but because of misunderstandings on both sides about what the other wanted out of an alliance, plus the Spanish government’s mistrust of the Wichitas because of their friendly relationship with the Comanches, nothing substantial came of these efforts. However, the Wichitas eventually tried to leverage their relationship with the Comanches into a Spanish alliance. Throughout the 1760s, Taovaya chief Eyasiquiche tried to convince the Spanish that his people would be able to persuade the Comanches to stop their raids on Spanish settlements in Texas.54 As a possible Spanish alliance hung in the balance, the Wichita villages continued to scatter further south and west in response to continued Osage attacks.55


54 Smith, *The Wichita Indians*, 42. Conflict between Spanish officials in the Texas colony and the Louisiana colony also seriously hampered any kind of alliance with any of the Wichita bands.

55 Hamalainen speculates that the movement of groups like the Shawnee and the Delaware across the Mississippi around this time pushed the Osage to be more aggressive in their attempts to hold on to their prime hunting grounds in the Cross Timbers, but I think that the numbers of eastern tribes moving east before the 1790s was too small to push the Osage to do anything drastic. The Osage continued their attacks because they were quite profitable.
on the Red River were abandoned. Many Taovayas retreated up-river to be closer to their Comanche allies, while the Guichitas went southwest, becoming more reliant on buffalo for subsistence and gradually abandoning their farming practices.

The Wichitas (all five of the main bands) were finally able to confirm an official alliance with the Spanish by October 1771, much to the dismay of the Comanches. The Wichitas hoped that access to Spanish goods would put them in the perfect position to play the two major powers that surrounded them off against each other. Making a Spanish alliance did not mean they wanted to give up their friendship with the Comanches. It is telling that they only promised to try stopping Comanche raids in Texas through persuasion and diplomacy, and did not promise military aid against the Comanches. But the Wichitas would have been able to imply to the Spanish that they might fight the Comanches, for such an act would not necessarily have destroyed their Comanche alliance. In the Comanches’ worldview, two groups could raid and trade with each other at the same time because those were not mutually exclusive actions.

Because of their relatively small population and limited economic access, it is incorrect to characterize the Wichitas using the same “imperial” terminology that so easily describes the Osages and the Comanches. But it is important to acknowledge the Wichita bands’ savvy diplomatic maneuvers during this period. They worked hard to establish a Spanish alliance, while trying to spin that alliance as a positive development for their Comanche allies too. In 1772, Spanish official Athanase de Mezieres traveled through the Wichita villages in Texas, meeting

57 Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire*, p. 96
58 The Comanches made a distinction between the Spaniards in New Mexico and those in Texas, a fact that always frustrated and confused Spanish officials. When Spain took over the Louisiana territory, things probably became even more complicated.
while there with a Comanche chief, who expressed his interest in making peace with Spain. Thus the Wichitas tried to keep their promise to broker peace between the Comanches and the Spanish, but bands like the Guichitas and Taovayas were not willing to abandon their close location to the Comanches and move east, as the Spanish had requested. The Wichitas’ goals of gaining advantage through diplomacy were devastated by two smallpox epidemics in 1777 and 1778. It has been estimated that the Wichitas lost up to one third of their total population in these outbreaks. The Iscanis were so devastated by the disease that their remaining population was absorbed by the Tawakonis, and they lost many elements of their distinctive band identity. By the 1780s, the Wichita villages had diminished so much that French, British, and American traders were able to bypass the Wichitas and trade directly with the Comanches. The Wichitas’ position as middlemen in a vast trade network was gone, but they continued to try getting that profitable position back as the eighteenth century came to a close.

It is no surprise, then, that the remaining Wichitas were eager to participate in the 1785 expedition of Pedro Vial and Francisco Xavier Chaves, who were sent by Spanish government officials from Nacogdoches to negotiate a peace treaty with the eastern Comanche bands that regularly raided Texas. Wichita representatives accompanied Vial and Chaves and helped broker an agreement in which the Spanish agreed to finally trade firearms to the Comanches if the

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Comanches agreed to avoid contraband American traders.\textsuperscript{61} By 1785, the number of Americans heading west from Louisiana to trade with the Comanches for horses was increasing rapidly, fueling another period of sustained growth for the Comanches. It was a shift to which American policymakers back in Washington were completely oblivious. For decades, the U.S. government would remain ignorant of the extent of Comanche power and their own citizens’ contributions to its growth.\textsuperscript{62}

Americans flocked into the region in numbers that would have astonished the federal government had there been a way to track these migrants. Philip Nolan, perhaps one of the most well-known of these American traders, operated a very profitable trade in the Old Southwest for nearly a decade. He developed a close relationship with the eastern Comanches, living among them for many months and most likely learning at least some of their language. His death at the hands of Spanish soldiers in Texas in 1801 while catching wild mustangs did little to discourage other Americans from following his lead. Most Americans based their operations out of either Nacogdoches or Natchitoches, living among the Indians for only a few weeks, possibly a few months, while trades were conducted. Others, like a Philadelphia man named John Calvert, chose a more permanent residence. An astonished Spanish official wrote to his superiors in 1794 at Calvert had set up a crude blacksmith’s forge at a Taovaya village. In 1799, Spanish officials tried to arrest a group of Americans at the same villages, who had come, reportedly along with

\textsuperscript{61} Hamalainen shows the extent of the Comanche trade with the Spanish by describing the 1806 visits of over 2,000 Comanches to San Antonio and Nacogdoches to receive Spanish presents and trade. F. Todd Smith describes this treaty as something that all “parties had been negotiating off and on for thirteen years,” \textit{From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786–1859} (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. xi.

\textsuperscript{62} Kavanagh, \textit{Comanche Political History}, pp. 93-110.
some Choctaws, Cherokees, and Quapaws, to trade guns and powder with the Wichitas for horses and mules.\(^{63}\)

Meanwhile, the Osages continued to sack any settlements left near the Red River. In December 1785, they delivered a “crushing blow” to the occupants of the dwindling Guichita and Taovaya villages that remained on the river. The Wichitas hoped the Spanish would help them—either by cutting off trade with the Osages from Spain’s Mississippi River posts or by sending soldiers against them. Spain did not respond, but the Comanches eventually did. In 1789, a 700-man force from all five Wichita bands plus some Comanches “invaded the Osage territory” and won a decisive victory.\(^{64}\) This Comanche and Wichita victory, combined with the encroachment of other Native groups from the east on Osage territory after the American colonists’ victory over the British in 1783 created a brief respite from Osage raids.

The ripple effects of the American Revolution on the Native peoples west of the Mississippi were considerable. Colin G. Calloway has described the Revolution as the beginning of a two decade series of wars between Indian groups east of the Mississippi and the new United States. Some tribes, like the Potawatomis and the Kickapoos, had been divided over whether to support the British or the Americans during the war. But after the Americans won, nearly all Native nations east of the Mississippi realized that the rapid expansion of the American population into the West posed a serious problem to their continued national autonomy. Many

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\(^{64}\) Smith, *The Wichita Indians*, p. 87. Grant Foreman devoted an entire chapter in his book *Indians and Pioneers: The American Southwest before 1830* to Osage activities during this period, which he entitled “The Osages Terrorize the Southwest.” Foreman was prone to exaggeration, but his description seems warranted here.
groups chose to fight back, and a united resistance movement developed that included the Shawnees, Cherokees, Choctaws, Miamis, Delawares, Potawatomis and many others. They tried to stop American expansion at the Ohio River, but despite some stunning successes, the alliance fractured, and what remained of it was defeated at the battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794.\textsuperscript{65} The American Revolution also precipitated a shift in Spain’s Indian policies. Concerned about westward American expansion, Spanish officials in Louisiana invited Chickasaws, Shawnees, Choctaws, Creeks, Delawares, and many other groups to settle along the west bank of the Mississippi as a buffer to that expansion.

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Thus as the eighteenth century came to a close, Spain clung tenuously to its territorial possessions north of Mexico, wedged between three other expansionist powers (the Comanches, the Osages, and the United States). The Comanches were arguably the most economically powerful of those three, for it was the western trade in horses and mules created by the Comanches and their allies that was helping to fuel the growth of the plantation and farming economy of the U.S. southeast, a development that, ironically, led directly to the dispossession of Native groups there. The market for horses and mules funneled across the Mississippi through Louisiana was already highly profitable in the 1770s and 1780s, and it became almost unfathomably so by the 1790s. As Hamalainen describes it, Comanche and U.S. expansion “co-

evolve[d]” as they were “feeding on one another’s successes” even though neither fully realized their dependence on one another.66

The rise of the Osage and Comanche empires and the displacement of the Caddo and Wichita nations is the context in which the Indian policies of the United States federal government must be understood. The mass migrations of Native people into the West had already begun by the time the U.S. purchased Louisiana Territory from Spain. That purchase was not a real assumption of sovereignty over the region, but rather it was the moment when the U.S. entered the contest for control, economic opportunities, and Native allies in the trans-Mississippi West. In fact, finding familiar groups like the Cherokees, Shawnees, and Delawares already in the West when they arrived may have inspired federal officials to begin trying to co-opt this Native survival strategy for their own purposes.

This chapter has demonstrated that the old southwest in the early decades of the nineteenth century can be best understood as a contested ground between four imperial states: the Comanche nation, the Osage nation, Spain, and the United States. The presence of two powerful Native empires in this region had serious consequences for the Indian nations who were removing to the area as a result of sustained American expansion, but federal officials rarely understood the role that the Osage and Comanche empires played in the outcomes of their policies. Many Native nations were willing to begin removal in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in part because of the economic opportunities offered by the trade networks of the Osage and Comanche empires, although removing groups too did not always fully understand the contexts to which they were attracted. The pull of the West has often been

66 Hamalainen, Comanche Empire p. 142.
overlooked in the historiography of Indian removal because the push from the United States was so strong. Eventually, the United States would become painfully aware that the Osages, the Comanches, and other Plains tribes were powerful enough to up-end the dream of complete Indian removal, leaving government officials scrambling to find a way to assert control over western Natives as well.
Early Native Settlers in the Southwest
Chapter 2

“Father, we are a wandering people, not from inclination, but necessity...” - Shawnee leaders to the president, circa 1811

The old Southwest was a dynamic and complicated place as the eighteenth century drew to a close. Spanish power was diminishing, the Comanche empire was on the rise, and the Osages (although beginning to feel the effects of post-Revolution Native westward migration) were also reaching the peak of their political and economic power. However, the arrival of those eastern Indian groups would significantly change the shape of power in the southwest that had been developing over the previous century. The United States’ purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803 also contributed to important changes in the region because federal officials assumed that the purchase conveyed a level of sovereignty that did not exist in reality.

The American West has long been viewed by historians as an outlet that gave white Euro-American migrants great economic and cultural freedom. Few have realized that this was, for a time, nearly as true for the Native peoples of North America as it was for white Euro-Americans. As the American Revolution ended, and the ability of eastern Indians to resist the expansion of the seaboard populations into the interior dwindled, many Native groups began looking to the west as a place where they could reestablish their cultural and economic freedoms in more favorable contexts. Members of nations like the Cherokees, Shawnees, Kickapoos, and Delawares were among the first to make the move west in the late eighteenth century, scattering across what would eventually become Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma.

The old Southwest was an attractive region where borders were fluid, straddling the line between the hilly woodlands and the treeless, rolling prairies that were full of massive bison
herds. Such topography provided significant advantages to the Native peoples who lived there. They could enjoy the protection of the woodlands, engage in agricultural production, and easily hunt on the Plains. Before 1803, the region had the extra advantage of being outside the boundaries of United States sovereignty. After that territory was ceded by France to the United States, Texas remained as the western outlet for Native groups who sought further distance from the influence of the United States government and its Indian policies. But even after 1803, the U.S. held sovereignty over the old Southwest in name only, a fact exploited when possible by migrating Native peoples for their own advantage.

This chapter demonstrates that many eastern Native groups began moving west of the Mississippi long before the Indian Removal Act of 1830. They did so for a variety of reasons, but all were connected to problems brought about by the expansion of the United States into the West. Once in the West, those groups affected, and were affected by, the Osage and Comanche empires that dominated the economic and political spheres of the old Southwest. The daily lives of the Osages were the most immediately affected by the arrival of eastern tribes because they were weakened by attacks and competition for hunting territory from eastern groups. However, this competition did not immediately diminish their power. In fact, the Osages remained one of the most important Native groups with which the U.S. government had to contend when it began

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2 However, as John Bowes wrote in *Exiles and Pioneers*, “Although the absence of federal authority allowed for the persistence of native autonomy, it also provided traders, settlers, speculators, and local officials countless opportunities to promote their agendas at the expense of both federal policies and Indian interests. . . . From the late 1700s onward, Indian residents of the trans-Mississippi West exploited the weaknesses in U.S. Indian policy to maintain a measure of autonomy even as they suffered from the inability and unwillingness of the American government to protect Indian welfare.” (p. 4)
implementing removal policies. In the removing nations, the Comanches saw potential allies and trade partners—no group coming from the East was yet powerful enough to challenge their supremacy on the plains. The large trade network controlled from Comancheria attracted many newly-arrived Native people into its orbit.

Thus Native migration into the trans-Mississippi West began with Native people making the choice to move as a way to maintain national sovereignty. Because these movements were choices, although increasingly constrained by limited options, it may not be correct to describe them all as “removals.” It is important to distinguish between a Native group, or part of one, choosing to migrate west and forced removal conducted by the U.S. government. Many Native peoples had no choice in their removal west of the Mississippi, but others did, before federal officials fully embraced removal as a policy goal designed to dismantle Native nations entirely. However, even though westward Indian migration did not always occur under the control of the U.S. government, federal officials did as much as they could to ensure that such removals took place, well before the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Native people were careful to use this fact to their advantage as well. Because the federal government was so deeply invested in removal, they were willing to make promises to removing groups for titles to land in the West, land that the federal government had minimal control over. Federal officials were also willing to make promises in treaties to protect removing groups from the supposedly savage western Indians by building roads and forts, which were valuable more as economic outlets for removing groups than they were necessary for their actual safety. In this way, many early Native migrants who went to settle in the West made demands on the federal government that were, ironically, not unlike those of many white Americans who were at the same time going west to settle.
The federal agents at the small number of government outposts in the trans-Mississippi West who fielded these requests for the fulfillment of treaty obligations also sent numerous other reports back east that showed both the extent of eastern Natives’ migration to the West and the power and control held by Native people who had long lived in the West. What federal officials knew (or thought they knew) about the West influenced their perceptions of the Indian people who lived there and the policies that were made regarding them. U.S. officials knew Native people were migrating west in large groups and that tens of thousands of others already lived there, but they only had vague ideas about those people even as they claimed sovereignty over them.

When news about the Louisiana Purchase first spread, many Americans were amazed that such a huge portion of the western North American continent had been obtained for so small a monetary consideration. Prominent New Orleans merchant Benjamin Morgan wrote in August 1803 that he thought “It is astonishing while the nations of Europe are destroying thousands of men & wasting millions of treasure for trifling spots of ground our government has in a few days and for a comparatively small sum of money purchased a tract of country nearly as large as Europe.” When it became apparent that France was willing to sell the Louisiana Territory, Thomas Jefferson was faced with an offer that was almost too good to be true. Yet Jefferson was immediately able to begin imagining the possibilities. As other historians have noted, Jefferson quickly connected the idea of purchasing Louisiana to the region’s potential as a practically

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boundless territory where the U.S. could send unwanted Native groups, thus ridding itself of the “Indian problem.”

One of the first reports Thomas Jefferson received about the Louisiana Territory came from Daniel Clark, an English-born New Orleans merchant who had become a Spanish citizen when Spain took control of Louisiana. The report was a general description of what Clark knew about the region, but it focused heavily on the numerous Indian tribes of Louisiana. Clark was particularly concerned about a group of Native people from different eastern nations who had recently gathered together at settlements on the St. Francis River, a tributary of the Mississippi River, in what would become Missouri Territory. Clark disparagingly referred to the settlement’s residents, which included Cherokees, Delawares, Shawnees, Miamis, Peorias, and Chickasaws, as “Vagabonds,” and he believed these Indians only lived west of the Mississippi because manipulative Spanish officials had lured them there to encourage them to launch hostilities against the western borders of the United States.

Clark’s views about westward-moving Natives were representative of those of other U.S. officials, who gave little agency to Native people in their decisions to migrate to the west. The people settled on the St. Francis River may have been pulled to the west by promises of Spanish trade and protection against American encroachment, but the Spanish did not force those migrations any more than American expansion on the frontier did. Native people made important

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economic and political decisions within their own cultural and political contexts to make the territory west of the Mississippi their homes. Choosing to purposefully leave the boundaries of the United States was a vastly important political decision that cannot be explained away simply by emphasizing the inducements offered by some Spanish officials.\(^6\)

Much of the information that Jefferson and other U.S. officials in Washington, D.C. received about the Native peoples of the trans-Mississippi West came from Dr. John Sibley. It was widely rumored that Sibley had first arrived in Spanish Louisiana in 1802 as he attempted to escape his debts and his second wife.\(^7\) Sibley had traveled extensively in the region, possibly as far west as Santa Fe, before choosing to settle near Natchitoches. After the U.S. purchased Louisiana, Sibley sent Jefferson an unsolicited letter with long descriptions of the people and places he had seen during his travels. As an initial reward for that information, Sibley was given a contract to be the surgeon for the new U.S. army post at Fort Claiborne in Natchitoches. Sibley was a keen observer, and many of his subsequent letters to eastern officials reveal the extent of early Native migration into the West, as well as some of the reasons that such movements were

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\(^6\) See Robert A. Myers, “Cherokee Pioneers in Arkansas: The St. Francis Years, 1785-1813,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 56 for a discussion of the economic opportunities that awaited the Cherokees and others in the West; Cherokees were involved in the fur trade, in raising cash crops, especially cotton, and in stock raising.

so often an attractive option to eastern groups. Recognizing the value of Sibley’s insights, Jefferson appointed him as the U.S. Indian agent at Natchitoches in December 1804.⁸

Most of Sibley’s initial encounters with Native groups came because of the trading opportunities that existed in Natchitoches, which had been a regional trading center since the earliest period of French exploration. Many local tribes, like the Caddos, Alabamas, and Coushattas, often traveled to the settlement to exchange the skins they obtained on their winter hunts for manufactured goods that had become necessary parts of their daily lives. Many of the reports Sibley sent back to Washington describe incidents like the following: “The Grand Caddo Chief and a party of 15 Men of that Nation in Perogues Loaded with Skins arrived I gave them Provisions & a Can of Tobacco.”⁹

One of the eastern Native groups Sibley most often encountered in the southwest were the Choctaws. Various bands of Choctaws regularly crossed the Mississippi to hunt, and often stopped in Natchitoches for supplies before continuing further west; they also often stopped at the post on their return to sell the fruits of their hunting and trading ventures. However, some Choctaws chose to settle permanently in the region. One of the main Choctaw settlements west of the Mississippi in the early nineteenth century was at a place called “Bayou Chico” on the Ouachita River, a significant stream in the eastern part of Louisiana that originates in the hills of

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⁸ In an 1805 letter to Dearborn, Sibley described Natchitoches as “a small, [ir]regular, and meanly-built village, half a dozen houses excepted, is found. This village is on the west side of the division of the river, and the high pine and oak woods approach within two or three hundred yards of the river. In the village are about forty families; twelve or fifteen are merchants . . . and nearly all are French. The fort built by our troops, since their arrival, called Fort Claiborne, is situated on a small hill, one street from the river . . . all the hill is occupied by the fort and barracks . . . for the soldiers, and does not exceed two acres of ground. The southern and eastern prospects from it are very beautiful.” Quoted in Charles Wilson Hackett, ed., Pichardo’s Treatise on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas, Vol. 2. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1934), p. 58.

⁹ John Sibley to Henry Dearborn, April 14, 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1. See also Burton and Smith, Colonial Natchitoches, pp. 20-25.
western Arkansas. Sibley estimated that the settlement contained “about 80 men,” so the total population was likely at least double that number. Bayou Chico’s residents regularly hunted in the region, and they often passed through Natchitoches on their hunting expeditions, but their principal source of food was the corn that they raised.\(^\text{10}\)

In March 1807 Sibley reported that the Choctaws had recently established a peace agreement with the Caddos, whom they had often raided while on their western hunting trips. Indicating that the Chickasaws also hunted in the southwestern borderlands, Sibley reported that they had served as mediators in the Choctaw/Caddo conflict.\(^\text{11}\) As a result of the peace agreement, a greatly increased number of Choctaws had begun, as Sibley put it, wandering around the region in “Small Idle Hordes.” The leader of these Choctaws had recently died, and Sibley was concerned that if no one replaced him, it would be even more impossible to get the western Choctaws settled in one place. Small idle hordes of Indians moving aimlessly about the frontier was the great fear of federal officials in Washington, who would soon realize that, while removal was desirable, it would be better accomplished through treaties that contained provisions for land exchanges. The practice of exchange (discussed in a later chapter) would ensure Indians had a designated place to go once they had crossed the Mississippi. These early reports about wandering eastern Indians in the West provide important insights into how officials in Washington thought about Native westward migration just after the Louisiana Purchase, what they knew about the extent of movements into the West that had already taken place, and the

\(^{10}\) John Sibley to the Secretary of War, April 5, 1805, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1.

\(^{11}\) John Sibley to the Secretary of War, May 20, 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1.
extent of their concern about how this movement might prevent the implementation of future removals.12

Another group that Sibley described as the Huani Choctaws had lived in the West for a long time. After the Huani Choctaws had “emigrated from [their] Town on the East Side of Mississippi upwards of 15 years ago,” they had made friends with and settled on lands adjacent to the Biloxis. Like many small southeastern coastal Indian nations, the Biloxis and Huani Choctaws had suffered greatly from disease and other effects of close, centuries-long contact with Europeans. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, remnants of these groups often banded together and became neighbors to provide mutual protection, in new locations west of the Mississippi.13 The Huanis maintained ties with the eastern Choctaws, often traveling in the West with hunting parties that had recently crossed the Mississippi. Sibley reported in August 1807 that “a pretty large Party” of Huanis and eastern Choctaws had arrived together in Natchitoches, likely after finishing a hunt. They may have even gone to trade with the Caddos, Wichitas, or Comanches, but their real object in coming to Natchitoches seemed to be maintaining a good relationship with Sibley and the Americans in the region. The Choctaws brought with them “a Small Bay American Raised Horse” that they found found “Amongst Some Wild Horses Near the River Sabine,” hoping to return the horse to its apparently American owner.14

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12 Additionally, in March 1805, Sibley had reported about “rambling hunting parties scattered all over Lower Louisiana.” John Sibley to the Secretary of War, April 5, 1805, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1. For more info on the Caddo/Choctaw conflict, see F. Todd Smith, The Caddo Indians: Tribes at the Convergence of Empire, pp. 87, 103.


14 John Sibley to the Secretary of War, August 8, 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1.
The Huanis who lived permanently in the west did well for themselves. Sibley viewed them much more favorably than the other bands of Choctaws in the west that he considered dangerous because they appeared to have no fixed place of residence. The Huanis lived about forty miles south of Natchitoches, and had “fenced fields [that were] Cultivated . . . with the Plow, Built Comfortable Huts, and were Collecting about them Some Stocks of Domestic Animals.” However, some insidious persons that Sibley only describes as “Surveyors,” who were not named but almost undeniably had to have been white Americans, went out and ordered the Indians off the lands. Settlers came in and began building fences and homes, pushing the Huani Choctaws off their settlements. Sibley felt the injustice of the situation. But he only hoped, rather than believed, that reporting this situation to federal officials would actually stop the white “surveyors” from pushing the Huani Choctaws off their land. Sibley himself did nothing to rectify the situation. This situation is a particularly interesting example of when the lack of federal control in the West was detrimental to migrating Natives’ interests.¹⁵

However, by 1815 many Choctaws were still living around Natchitoches, although in less ideal circumstances than the Huanis had been previously living. When Thomas Gales, the Indian agent who replaced John Sibley, arrived at the post in January of that year, he found 215 Choctaws camped nearby who were in desperate need of provisions. Gales gave few details about this group of Choctaws, so it is unclear if they had recently crossed the Mississippi or if they had emigrated in the past and fallen on hard times. However, this example illustrates that

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westward migration was not always a profitable decision. Hunger and uncertainty faced migrants just as it did those who remained in the east.¹⁶

Eastern Natives continued to cross the Mississippi into other areas of Louisiana. When James Wilkinson took office as the first governor of Louisiana Territory in October 1805, he almost immediately requested an agent to serve the many Delawares, Shawnees, and Cherokees who he discovered living in significant numbers near St. Louis.¹⁷ By 1809, the volume of Native traffic crossing back and forth across the Mississippi had become so great that the Euro-American residents of New Madrid, a growing settlement just across the river from Kentucky, appealed to the new territorial governor, William Clark, to appoint a special agent just for their town to settle the disputes that often arose between the Native migrants and the white residents.¹⁸ Clark considered it, but was cautious because the federal government was already developing deep financial commitments to Indians in the West and was increasingly reluctant to spend more money than was absolutely necessary. Federal officials in Washington had recently informed western agents that because federal financial commitments to tribes in the Louisiana Territory had become so “considerable” agents would need to begin exercising “the greatest prudence . . . in deciding on most of the questions which may relate to measures involving expenses.”¹⁹ By 1811, the federal government’s annuity commitments totaled $39,956. Much of that went to “civilization” funds for eastern Choctaws, Cherokees, and Creeks, but a significant portion was

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¹⁶ Thomas Gales to Secretary of War, February 1, 1815, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1.

¹⁷ Wilkinson to Secretary of War, October 8, 1805, Territorial Papers, Vol. XIII, p. 235.

¹⁸ Militia Officers of New Madrid to William Clark, no date except 1809, enclosed with a letter from William Clark to the Secretary of War, April 29, 1809, Territorial Papers, Vol. XIV, p. 270.

¹⁹ Secretary of War to Pierre Chouteau, February 10, 1806, Territorial Papers, Vol. XIII, p. 443
also dedicated to fulfilling treaty commitments made with western Natives and the many bands of eastern Indians already living west of the Mississippi.20

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The Osages, who were used to dominating the Wichitas to their southwest and holding their own against the Comanches, were overwhelmed by the enormity of the influx of both Native and white migrants that increased rapidly at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Native groups that settled along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and their tributaries began blocking some of the Osages’ access to the British, French, and American traders that had kept them well-supplied with weapons. However, increased difficulty accessing important goods was only a small part of the problem. Whereas the Comanches had little interest in invading the Osages’ home territory and the Wichitas had always lacked the manpower to do so even if they had wished it, the migrating eastern Native nations arrived in the heart of the Osages’ home territory, and increasingly they came not just to hunt or trade, but to make permanent homes there. These developments would drastically affect the Osages’ political and military decisions, and also help initiate some drastic changes in their culture. Because most Osages violently resisted the encroachment of other Native groups, and because those eastern Native groups were so obviously eager to settle on Osage lands and to push past them to gain access to western hunting grounds and trade networks, the federal government realized quite early in the nineteenth century that bringing the Osages in line would be a necessary prerequisite to the fulfillment of the goal of complete Indian removal from the eastern United States. Such conflicts with the Osages shaped the first experiences of many eastern groups in the West and probably ended up

20 Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, M-271, Roll #1.
coloring their perceptions of the viability of westward migration as a way to obtain sovereign spaces. Trouble with the Osages most certainly influenced federal officials’ perceptions of the circumstances in the West, giving them the impression that western Native groups would always be violently opposed to the migration of other Native groups into the region.  

Spanish officials in Louisiana had noted both the presence of eastern hunters in the West and their conflicts with the Osages in the late eighteenth century. U.S. officials noticed similar conflicts as they began the process of taking over administrative control of Louisiana after 1803. In 1806, John B. Treat (the U.S. factor at the Arkansas Post) reported that “The increase both of Choctaws & Chickasaws from over the Mississippi the year past, has been very considerable.” However, he also noticed a lull in those groups’ conflicts with the Osages, reporting that many Chickasaw and Choctaw hunters had been able to go up the Arkansas River to hunt without incident. Treat attributed this lack of attacks to Osage contentment with the supplies that they were receiving from the British traders to the north. He assumed that the Osages only made attacks to obtain supplies that they could not otherwise get, but this was only partly true. The Osages may have had the necessary supplies, but they had begun to lack the numbers to always fight back against the eastern hunters and migrants who had begun to surround them from the south, the east, and the north. Soon thereafter, Treat reported that there were “about fifty” Choctaws near the Arkansas Post who were preparing to go hunting up the Arkansas River and that they were prepared, if necessary, to fight the Osages for the right to do so. The pressure from

21 For a description of some of the changes to Osage society at this time, see DuVal, The Native Ground, pp.164-95; Gilbert C. Din and Abraham P. Nasatir, The Imperial Osages: Spanish-Indian Diplomacy in the Mississippi Valley (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983).


all these encroachments contributed to the Osages’ fracturing politically into several distinct
groups who believed in different strategies to cope with the changing circumstances.

From the north, Potawatomis, Foxes, and Sauks sometimes raided Osage villages,
especially those along the Missouri and Osage Rivers. Sauk and Fox bands in particular took
many captives from these raids. Potawatomi raids on Osage villages were often particularly
brutal, because Potawatomi warriors purposefully waited to attack until “after the warriors and
other able-bodies persons had left” to go on hunts, which left the villagers vulnerable. The
Osages were used to being the ones who perpetrated such attacks, instead of being the victims of
them. Their home territory had been far away from the Comanches and Wichitas that they raided,
so they had always felt secure about leaving the most vulnerable members of their society
virtually unguarded while their warriors departed for months-long hunting and raiding
expeditions.

Other groups continued to fill the region north of the Osages’ home territory. In an 1816
report, William Clark (then the governor of the northern portion of Louisiana that had been
designated “Missouri Territory”) noted that there were two hundred Piankeshaws (a band of the

another band of Sauks had just moved the village “a distance of 60 or Eighty miles West of the
Mississippi” and he was concerned about going that far west to live among them, as Indian agents were
generally required to do. William Clark to Henry Dearborn, December 3, 1807, describing an attack on an
For background on Potawatomi raids on the Osages, see R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers

25 Din and Nasatir, *The Imperial Osages*, p. 364.

he reports the purchase of a captive Osage child from the Sacs for $150. An Osage chief later told
William Clark that he expected the United States to fulfill its promise to get other Osage captives back
from the Sac as well. See William Clark to Henry Dearborn, May 18, 1807, *Territorial Papers*, Vol. XIV,
141.
Miami nation), fifty Peorias, three thousand Sacs, fifteen hundred Foxes, and twelve hundred Otoes living northwest of St. Louis. Those groups were troubling to both the Osages and the white settlers who were already branching out west of St. Louis, the territorial capital, but they were also troubling to U.S. officials for other reasons. Clark reported that he was in the process of trying to establish contact with all of those groups to find out if any of them had claims to the lands they occupied in the West that the U.S. government would consider legitimate, or if they were recent migrants whose claims could be more easily ignored.27

From the southeast, many different groups slowly encroached on Osage territory by developing settlements on the Arkansas River, both above and below the Arkansas Post, which had for decades served as an unofficial stopping point for Native groups, beyond which attacks from the Osages were practically inevitable. The dwindling of the Quapaw Nation, with whom the Osages had long been allied and who had also served as a buffer for the Osages in the eighteenth century, also contributed to eastern tribes’ ability to encroach on the Osages’ sovereign space. Major Stephen H. Long, who was scouting the region between the Arkansas and Red Rivers to select a location for a U.S. military post, reported to his superiors that “[b]esides the Quapaws, there are various other Indians residing upon the south side of the Arkansas who have no claim to the country they inhabit; among those are a considerable village of Chacktaws, a large number of Cherokees, several Shawnees, and a few Delawares and Creeks.”28

27 William Clark to the Secretary of War, November 4 1816, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1.

28 Major Stephen H. Long to Brigadier General A. Smith, from Belle Fontaine, January 30, 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, reporting about his scouting of the region between the Arkansas and Red Rivers.
The Delawares were one of the earliest eastern groups who migrated permanently west of the Mississippi. Although some Delaware leaders had been discussing the possibility of migration west with Spanish officials at least as early as 1782, it appears that it was not until 1793 that a band of Delawares received permission from the Spanish government to settle on lands near St. Louis.29 By the 1790s, at least 600 Delawares lived at settlements not far from Ste. Genevieve, at a place called Apple Creek. Historians John P. Bowes and Stephen Aron both highlight the role that Euro-American intermediaries, who were usually connected to the tribe by marriage, facilitated movements like this for the Delawares and other eastern tribes. Louis Lorimier, for example, played a prominent role in negotiating with the Spanish for the Delawares and providing economic connections that made such moves initially viable.30

Because the Delaware people had never been politically united as a nation, it was easy and common for small bands to break off from larger groups, a pattern that happened even more often once permanent moves into the West were made. Additionally, the Delawares often settled with migrant bands of other eastern Native groups. For example, by the 1810s, at least one village shared by Delawares and Shawnees had formed on the Red River about sixty miles upstream from Natchitoches. By the early 1820s, another settlement of Delawares and Shawnees, numbering by some reports at least 500, existed even further up the Red River at a place


sometimes called “Lost Prairie,” in what is today far southwestern Arkansas. Other reports indicated that some Kickapoo bands had settled in the region by that time as well.31

The Kickapoos had extensive experience in the West before different bands of that nation began settling there in the nineteenth century. Arrell M. Gibson, one of the few historians to write anything like a comprehensive history of the Kickapoo people, considered the Kickapoos to be one of the most well-traveled Native groups in North America. They regularly crossed south of the Ohio River “to wage war on the Lower Creeks and the Chickasaws” and for much of the late eighteenth century many of “their movements were generally west of the Mississippi.”32 Some bands of the Kickapoo nation had begun hunting between the Red and Arkansas Rivers as early as the 1750s, leading to clashes with the Osages. By 1765, some had decided to settle near St. Louis and more continued to slowly come west, until “[b]y 1803 . . . a string of small, detached Kickapoo villages, running up the Missouri for well over a hundred miles and southward along the Osage and other tributary streams, had been established.”33 However, this western Kickapoo group did not remain isolated from the other two main Kickapoo bands. They all seem to have regularly crossed back and forth across the Mississippi and “held general council on matters of common interest, and traveled together to St. Louis each year for council and presents from the Spanish.”34


33 ibid, p. 92.

34 ibid, pp. 32-33.
The Kickapoos had many opportunities in the West, not only for hunting and settlement, but as the welcome allies of the Spanish, who sometimes used Kickapoo mercenaries against the Osages. Even more often, the Spanish hired Kickapoo warriors to defend supply shipments that came up the Mississippi from New Orleans to St. Louis in the late eighteenth century. Chickasaws often attacked these shipments, stealing the majority of the cargo and often burning the boats used in the shipments. In March 1807, Missouri territorial secretary Joseph Browne reported the arrival in St. Louis of a group of eastern Kickapoos who complained about white encroachment on their lands, which they believed was in violation of the treaty that they had signed with the United States at Vincennes in 1803. However, Browne believed that the real reason for their visit was to scope out the possibility that the Spanish might retake control of Louisiana, an event that Browne believed the Kickapoos would consider a way to solve their problems with the United States in the east. Considering the Kickapoos’ past involvement with the Spanish government, Browne’s fears were probably not unfounded.35 According to Gibson, the only reason that the entire Kickapoo nation did not settle west of the Mississippi in the first decade of the nineteenth century was their involvement in the anti-American alliance developed by Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa.36 But once that alliance collapsed, the majority of the


36 Gibson, *The Kickapoos*, p. 48
Kickapoos who had remained in the East moved west. In 1819 alone at least 2,000 Kickapoos migrated to western settlements.\textsuperscript{37}

Even some Seminoles, who usually do not enter the timeline of removal until the 1840s, were reported to be in the West as early as 1820. In April of that year the Arkansas \textit{Gazette} published a story detailing how “a party of Seminole Indians,” had “for about a year past been prowling about in the neighborhood of Little Prairie, a few miles below New Madrid.” White residents had been uneasy about the presence of roaming Indians so near their settlements, and became even more so after stories spread about how the Seminoles had scalped an American fur trader who was descending the Mississippi River. The \textit{Gazette} often published reports of Indian “depredations” to promote its readership’s view that all Indians should be removed from the limits of Arkansas Territory, revealing that by 1820, Americans were already convinced that western spaces like Arkansas were not large enough to accommodate both Indians and whites.\textsuperscript{38}

Less than two decades after the Louisiana Purchase, the enormous West was already coming to be perceived by some white Americans as too small.

However, some Native people may have begun to think that as well. Native people who were being displaced from their homes in the East contributed significantly to the displacement of other Native groups in the West. The arrival of eastern Native groups spelled demise for the

\textsuperscript{37} Gibson, \textit{The Kickapoos}, p. 83. According to Gibson “two renegade bands” remained east until the 1830s, stubbornly refusing “to consider the subject of removal.” Gibson only briefly connects these early Kickapoo removals to the larger design of the federal government in removing all eastern Indians west of the Mississippi. His comment that “The government’s removal of the Kickapoos to the Osage River country, under the auspices of the treaties of Edwardsville and Fort Harrison, simply made official a movement which had been under way for nearly a century” (p. 91) hints at the idea that removal west of the Mississippi was initially part of Native-driven responses to the struggles brought on by the expansion of the American frontier, which the federal government eventually co-opted for its own purposes.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, April 29, 1820.
Quapaws, who had previously been the most dominant power in the lower Arkansas Valley. In 1816, a report by William Clark estimated that they consisted of only about 1,000 people. After making a treaty with the U.S. that Quapaw leaders hoped would provide their people with a permanent home and annuity income, it quickly became clear that they would receive neither when no reservation boundaries were marked for them, and there was much confusion among U.S. officials in the West about the payment of their promised annuity. The Quapaws had tried to use federal officials’ desire to control Native westward migration by organizing reservations to secure land for themselves, but poor communication and lack of real federal authority in the region prevented such an outcome. Eventually, the Quapaws followed other groups whose attempts to maintain sovereignty within the claimed boundaries of the United States had failed, and many moved across the Red River into Texas.

The Caddos encountered a very similar series of events. A U.S. government report in 1818 stated that the Caddos were living south of the Red River and much further west, deep in Texas. Additionally, the various bands of the Caddo Nation that had once been very numerous had been so devastated by disease that they had become mixed together into what one U.S. official, Colonel William A. Trimble, viewed as one large, indistinguishable group. The collapse of some Native populations in the West as a result of the arrival of other Native groups is a vital part of the story of westward Native migration in the nineteenth century. Eastern groups

39 William Clark to the Secretary of War, November 4 1816, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1.

40 George Izard to the Secretary of War, September 24, 1825, LR-OIA, Arkansas Superintendency, Roll #29.

41 William A. Trimble John C. Calhoun, August 1818, in Jedidiah Morse, ed., A Report to the Secretary of War on Indian Affairs (New Haven, 1822).
sought their own sovereign spaces, often at the expense of others, even when they did not necessarily engage in conflicts with western groups over space. The mere fact of westward migration and the sheer numbers involved were enough to overwhelm groups like the Caddos and Quapaws, who had been under pressure from other problems related to Euro-American trade, travel, and settlement in the trans-Mississippi West for centuries.

The Shawnees were another eastern Native nation with an extensive history of early westward migration, but unlike most other groups, their westward movements have begun to receive significant attention from historians. Recent books by historians Stephen Warren and Sami Lakomaki that seek to change the discussion about the scope and timeline of Indian removal have used the westward movements of the Shawnee people as their primary examples. Warren maps at least ten distinct Shawnee villages that existed in eastern Missouri alone in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many of these villages were focused around a land grant near modern-day Cape Girardeau that a Shawnee band had received from the Spanish government in 1793. The majority of these early migrants probably belonged to the Piqua and Kispokotha bands, which Warren and Bowes argue moved completely west of the Mississippi by the end of the 1790s. Like the Delawares, the different bands of the Shawnee nation often acted independently of one another, pursuing paths that each thought best for themselves, although cooperation and travel between groups was common.


Once in the West, some Shawnee migrants chose to focus more of their economic activities on farming, seeing that as their best way to maintain sovereignty and to prosper, while others, like those who would move southwest to the Red River, sought ever-better hunting grounds. Some Shawnee bands made even more drastic changes to their lifestyle. For example, in 1811, William Clark reported that a group “of about Forty [Shawnee] Families who reside near the Missouri on a Branch of the Merimack River” had come to him in St. Louis requesting permission to mine lead ore from a site near their village, a practice that was not uncommon among Native groups on the upper Missouri and Mississippi Rivers in the early nineteenth century. Clark hoped that the request would be granted by the federal government, because he believed that those Shawnees were “a practicable and well disposed people,” and also noted that they had been helpful in returning runaway horses to nearby American settlements and “preventing the [robberies] of the Osages.” Eventually, secretary of war William Eustis gave Clark and affirmative answer, granting the Shawnees a three square miles tract of land that they had requested. It was a very small plot of land, but even so Eustis made it clear that this grant was “subject . . . to the will & pleasure of the President of the U.S.”

The story of this Shawnee village is one of the reasons why historians should not make too many broad generalizations about the groups who voluntarily migrated west of the Mississippi in the early nineteenth century. These Shawnees had fled the encroachment of the

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45 William Clark to James Madison, April 10, 1811, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1. On May 31, 1811, the secretary of war responded, granting permission for the Shawnees to mine a three-square-mile section of land. See Secretary of War to William Clark, May 31, 1811, *Territorial Papers*, Vol. XIV.
white American population and the empty promises of the treaties that they had made with the
U.S. government. They were also leaving disagreements among their own people and their
eastern allies about how to handle the problems and pressures presented by U.S. expansion. Yet
in the West, they tried to work with U.S. government representatives to try to secure their
sovereignty. It made sense for them to do this, even based on their past experiences with the
United States, because the context in the West was significantly different.

In his letter explaining the Shawnees’ request, Clark included a memorial given to him by
two Shawnee leaders, Chothe [or Ohothe] and Noma [or Fish] in which they explained how
much movement had become a part of their lives, stating “we are a wandering people, not from
inclination, but from necessity.” They had been unable to find peace east of the Mississippi, and
so they migrated west looking for answers, yet still hopeful that the U.S. government would
fulfill promises that it had made previously to designate a specific territory west of the
Mississippi for the Shawnee people where they could live unmolested. The chiefs lamented,
“Where is the land we can say to our band, build your houses strong, make your fences high, and
raise a plenty of cows & hogs, our great father, will protect us in our possessions? We know of
no such land.” They also spoke of their economic struggles, noting that the “Buffaloes & Elk is
drove off to a great distance & Deer is getting scarce.” So they had adapted and begun “raising
cows and hogs” in addition to their plan to mine led ore if given permission to do so and secure
rights to the lands that they wanted to mine.46 The request was granted, and a few years later,
Clark reported that about 1,300 Shawnees were living in three distinct towns in Missouri; two

46 Memorial of Chothe or Ohothe [aka James Rogers] and Noma [aka Fish], in Clark to Madison, April 10, 1811, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1.
were near their allies, the Cherokees, on the St. Francis River, while another was just fifty miles west of St. Louis, likely the band that had requested permission to mine.47

All of the eastern tribes who moved west of the Mississippi in the early nineteenth century did so for their own reasons and with vastly different outcomes. However, they almost all ended up clashing with the Osages at some point. Soon after the Louisiana Purchase, an American trader named Jacob Bright had received a license to trade with the Osages and other tribes on the Arkansas River. He also quickly noted the existence of conflict between not only the Osages and the Choctaws, but also the Choctaws and other tribes that either hunted or lived west of the Mississippi. During a meeting with a large band of Osages on the Arkansas River (probably not far from the present-day border between Oklahoma and Arkansas), one of the Osage chiefs, Couzichequeday, told Bright that “The Red People below on the River are always at War with us . . . We want no War, there are Chickasaws, Chocktaws, Cherokees, Delawars and Arkansas are all at War with us.” Couzichequeday’s claim that his people did not want these wars was true—but the Osages also wanted to maintain their exclusive access to the rich hunting grounds in central and western Indian Territory, hunting grounds that were becoming increasingly valuable as the Native and white populations of the trans-Mississippi West grew at a rapid pace. Access to the hunting grounds were not the only reason that the majority of eastern groups clashed with the Osages at least at some point. The trade networks that existed on the buffalo plains were incredibly valuable as well. The possibilities that Native groups could tap

47 William Clark to the Secretary of War, November 4, 1816, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1.
into if they had access to those hunting grounds were so great that they were willing to engage in extended warfare with the Osages to get it.48

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The extensive trade networks that had been developed on the plains by the Comanches, Wichitas, Pawnees, other Native groups, and their Euro-American trading partners, were reaching the peak of their profitability at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Mississippi River and its tributaries were the conduits by which goods from the plains flowed into the eastern United States and around the world. In the north, the beaver skin trade dominated commerce for the first three decades of the nineteenth century. That trade was fueled by northern Native nations who were able to participate in that trade in part because of the horses that they received from southern Plains nations, especially the Comanches. As Hamalainen and others have written, the northern plains tribes were “chronically horse poor,” and always looking for southern connections to supply their needs. Complementing northern Natives’ desire for horses were the southern Natives’ desire for guns, which northern nations were able to get in abundance from reliable British traders.

Horses also fueled the trade on the southern Mississippi River, flowing out of Mexico and the plains into the American southeast, where the rise of the Cotton Kingdom provided an insatiable market for livestock. Many Euro-Americans were attracted to this trade, but Native people participated as well, and probably in greater numbers, although their movements are more difficult to follow because there is less documentation of them. Some whites attempted to operate within the bounds of legality by obtaining licenses, which meant there was a record of their

involvement in these trade networks. Native people were not required to obtain such licenses, and therefore they usually only appear briefly in the records, when they arrived at a trading hub like Natchitoches to sell their wares or to pick up stock for a westward trading trip.

American involvement in the southwestern trade may be more well documented, but Native traders usually dominated the trails. For example, in May 1818, Antonio Martinez, the last Spanish governor of Texas, reported that some Indian scouts had recently told him “that the traffic between the Comanches and the traders from the interior continues without interruption, and that arms, munitions, and other war supplies are being brought in.” Another Spanish observer reported in the late 1820s “The Comanches trade horses for guns and ammunition with other Indians, who in turn secure them from the United States of North America.” The trade went east/west, and north/south. Even as late as the 1820s, the north/south trade was regularly supplied by British traders from Canada, who used intermediaries like the Pawnees to trade guns to the Comanches. The east/west trade usually featured Americans and Native intermediaries, especially Natives who had recently emigrated and had a lot of American connections.

Even before arriving at the Arkansas Post, the U.S. factor, John B. Treat, had received reports “that the trade [at Arkansas Post] is very great, not only at the Town but extended up the River.” Some of the traders were Americans, but it was “three Frenchmen” who had “capitol” of “about $60,000” and dominated much of the trade. However, these Frenchmen were able to be so successful because they engaged Native hunters and traders, giving them “large credit” to


51 Treat to Davy from Chickasaw Bluffs, August 25, 1805, Letter Book of the Arkansas Trading House
stock up on supplies, which would be paid for in part by the furs that the Native hunters returned with. It was a common tactic used by Euro-American trade firms throughout the American West. Interestingly though, many of the Native people who took the French and other outfitters up on these offers were eastern groups who had crossed the Mississippi specifically for that purpose. Treat noted that although the local Quapaws were often engaged in these enterprises, a significant portion of the hunters at Arkansas Post were Choctaws and Chickasaws who crossed the Mississippi “at the St. Francis.”

After he arrived at the Arkansas Post, Treat got an even better idea of the level of Native trade he could expect to take place. The former Spanish commander who was there to meet Treat told him that during his tenure, the post had regularly received 400 packs of shaved deer skins, 500 bear skins, 3000 beaver skins, and 300 otter skins, in addition to smaller amounts of other skins, like raccoons and other, smaller animals. However, Treat believed that this would increase in the near future because so many more Choctaws and Chickasaws had recently begun crossing the Mississippi to participate in the trade. Just a few months later, Treat’s prediction of an increase in skins seemed to be coming true. He reported the receipt of 975 packs of deerskins and at least 1000 bear skins, but he had also begun to realize that the great increase in Native traders from the east did not mean that all of them would choose to be outfitted by or to trade with the U.S. factory at the Arkansas Post. They had other concerns and other connections that led them to make trades elsewhere. Treat mentioned in particular some white traders from Kentucky who

52 Treat to Dearborn, November 15, 1805, Letter Book of the Arkansas Trading House

53 Treat to Davy, February 27, 1806, Letter Book of the Arkansas Trading House
had outfitted a party of Choctaws with three thousand dollars worth of goods who intended to dispose of their furs elsewhere.\textsuperscript{54}

The trade on the southern plains was so profitable and extensive that New Mexican residents often traveled east from Santa Fe out onto the plains to trade with the Comanches, Kiowas, and Wichitas. Americans heading west in the 1820s were often surprised to meet these Mexican traders, often called \textit{comancheros} because of their regular trade with the Comanches, on the Red, Canadian, and Arkansas rivers, trading European goods moved from Mexican ports up overland trails to New Mexico.\textsuperscript{55} However, the traffic from the east and north almost always outweighed the traffic of traders from the West. In fact, Spanish officials nervously reported that the Kiowas had been able to obtain so many firearms from the Wichitas at the Red River villages, “that New Mexicans were getting some of their own firearms” from the Kiowas.\textsuperscript{56}

In a journal describing his travels, John Maley, an early American trader in the southwest, wrote about the “vast Indian trade” that existed along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, and lamented that it was mostly British traders, rather than Americans, who received the benefit of that trade.\textsuperscript{57} Maley’s journal reveals the extent to which Euro-American traders in the West relied on Native people to serve as intermediaries. As Maley prepared at Natchitoches in February 1812 for a trading expedition, he noted that his party of three Americans would be accompanied by 12 “Kosatis,” who he described as “a Creek band” that had recently settled near some Caddo

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\textsuperscript{54} Treat to Davy, April 15, 1806, Letter Book of the Arkansas Trading House. See also Treat to John [Moren or Maron?], September 20, 1808, ibid.


villages on the lower Red River. On the first day of the group’s departure, they passed a Cherokee man and his wife who were going the opposite direction, and they all shared a meal together. When Maley and the Kosatis encountered a party of Comanches near the Salt Fork of the Red River several weeks into their journey, the Comanches were clearly delighted to see both the Kosatis and Maley and his three American companions.

Trade was another reason both Native and Americans were attracted to Texas and the surrounding region. Native and American traders brought hides, horses, and mules from the interior to both Natchitoches and Nacogdoches. In the 1820s, upwards of $10,000 worth of goods were annually brought in to Nacogdoches by white and Native traders. The environment was significantly more competitive because of the “new competition from both Anglo-American trappers and traders that had begun to infiltrate the region as early as the 1780s and the newly arrived Indian groups in the southern plains.” The influx of new participants led to the development of three distinct trails that brought goods into and out of the southwestern plains. There was the route that went “through Nacogdoches into Louisiana” while another angled northeast, going from the interior of Texas “through Pecan Point on the Red River into Arkansas.” These were routes similar to ones that had been in existences for centuries, but a much newer north/south route developed as well, taking goods, especially horses, from the

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58 ibid, p. 55. Flores postulated that it was easier for Americans to be involved in the southwestern trade if they were accompanied by a large group of Native traders as well, because they rarely attracted the same level of attention from Spanish authorities in Texas.

59 ibid, p. 57.

60 ibid, p. 130.

southern plains directly “the the American settlements on the Missouri River,” hundreds of miles
to the north.62

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These are just a few of the many examples that exist that illustrate the extent of eastern
Native migrants’ deep interest in becoming involved in the extensive plains trade networks.
Nearly all groups who migrated west became involved in some way, although the various bands
of eastern Natives all moved west for their own reasons. As subsequent chapters will
demonstrate, U.S. government officials encouraged these removals, even while they sometimes
worried about their own lack of control over them. Nevertheless, Native people had as many
reasons to be pulled into the West as they did to be pushed out of the East. These circumstances
led to large waves of Native migration into the trans-Mississippi west many decades before what
is considered the “era of removal.” And they were significant waves of movement that would
have important consequences as the U.S. government became increasingly able to force removals
from the East and into the West.

62 ibid, p. 43.
Anglo-American Settlers in the Southwest
Chapter 3

“You told us that we were to have a clear opening to the setting of the sun, and that no white people were to be in front of us...” - Western Cherokee Chiefs to U.S. government officials

Although federal officials were eager for Native people to move west, they wanted to control those movements to achieve specific outcomes. But in the borderlands West, the U.S. government exercised very little power, not only over Native people, but over its own citizens as well. White Euro-Americans migrated west of the Mississippi simultaneously with the Native people who were trying to escape the problems caused by the expansion of the U.S. frontier. Some of the whites who moved into the West did so seeking trade opportunities. Native nations who controlled the plains trade networks, like the Comanches and Wichitas, welcomed white traders as sources of important goods. Even the eastern Native groups that had migrated considered white traders important economic lifelines as they attempted to establish sovereign spaces for themselves. U.S. officials in the West sometimes considered these white traders a problem because they used alcohol to get the trades they wanted, and in the opinion of some U.S. agents, even those who did not trade alcohol to the Indians sometimes exercised undue influence over Native people, pulling their allegiance in unwanted directions. Nevertheless, federal officials in the West were often forced to rely on these American traders as intermediaries and interpreters when they tried to implement policy goals, because these Americans often better understood the Native people and the political and economic contexts that existed in the West.

However, a much greater percentage of white migrants in the trans-Mississippi West in the early nineteenth century moved there to settle permanently than to trade with Native populations. These white Americans believed that the land there was owned by their government
because of the Louisiana Purchase, and therefore they had a right to settle on it, regardless of Indian claims to those lands. They anticipated that any Indian claims to the land were nothing more than temporary usage rights that would eventually be “extinguished” by the U.S. government, who would then grant fee simple titles to the lands claimed by white settlers. Like some early Native migrants, they also demanded the construction of forts for their protection. Often the claims of these different groups were incompatible, because each demanded similar things, and sometimes even the exact same land. Ultimately, the majority of the time federal officials ended up supporting the claims and concerns of the white males who could vote. But the federal government had also made many promises to migrant Indian nations, promises that would need to be fulfilled if the ultimate goal of removal was eventually to be achieved.

Documenting the early history of white expansion into the West thus shows how little power the U.S. government actually exercised in the West.1 It was beholden to the demands of its citizens for land, following along behind their lead, while also trying to satisfy other citizens who remained in the East and wanted Indians to be removed to the West. At the same time, to fulfill those promises for removal, federal officials had to try to control Native movements into the

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West, which meant granting reservations and sometimes even mining rights, as William Clark had done for the group of Shawnees in Missouri. These were concessions that white Americans in the West also wanted. Examining the parallel migrations of white and Native people into the trans-Mississippi West shows that one of the reasons that the federal government exercised so little power was because of the multiple and conflicting demands made on it. It also shows that even though federal officials, and sometimes Native and white settlers, wanted government intervention, it was often not possible for the United States to meet those wants. There was often a disconnect between how federal officials and American settlers and traders perceived the availability of the West for various uses. White settlers believed their status as U.S. citizens gave them the right the settle where they pleased, while U.S. officials saw this wanton settlement as a recipe for conflict with local Native populations and a possible barrier to Indian removal. American traders saw economic opportunities in the West, while U.S. officials saw potential conflicts of international proportions when American traders encroached on the claimed territories of Spain and Britain.

Federal agents were rarely good at gathering accurate information and sending it back to Washington, where officials usually relied more on their own assumptions about the West and Native people than the information they received to make their policy decisions. However, one of the reasons for the dearth of good information was the multiple and competing sources from which those federal agents had to derive the information. Among the thousands of white Americans who migrated west for settlement and trading opportunities in the early nineteenth century were many with their own competing desires for federal intervention.
As described in chapter 1, the French colonial government had spent significant amounts of time and effort trying to traverse the plains from Louisiana to Santa Fe and open up reliable trade routes. France and Spain spent decades competing with each other for exclusive trade with tribes like the Caddos, Wichitas, and Apaches, and trying to win the friendship of the expansionist Comanches. British traders in the colonial southeast also sometimes made their way west across the Mississippi River, especially after the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War. Both during and after the Revolution, American traders picked up where the old world empires had left off. Especially after a 1795 treaty with Spain that gave Americans the right to trade out of New Orleans, American interest in the commercial possibilities of the West significantly increased. Traffic developed on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers as goods from the interior were shipped to New Orleans. Much has been written about American participation in the fur trade in the northern part of the continent and the sometimes violent competition between American and British traders over alliances with Native groups, but very little has been written about Americans who participated in the Comanches’ plains trading network in the early nineteenth century, even though these trade networks were a major source of livestock for the American South during one of its most rapid periods of growth.

The most famous of the early American traders in the old southwest was Philip Nolan, who schemed so much that his name appeared in many more records than the majority of American traders in the region whose identities remain hidden. Nolan spent significant amounts of time on the southern plains with the Comanches, learning the Comanche language and developing important relationships with that group. He returned to the Comanches numerous
times, despite threats from Spanish officials who were deeply concerned that the influence of Nolan and other Americans would destroy their own tenuous relationships with Native groups in the southwest borderlands. Nolan was eventually killed by a detachment of Spanish troops while setting up corrals for another round of the wild horse catching that had made him so wealthy.²

However, despite Spain’s attempt to curb American trade traffic in the southwest by killing Nolan, it appears that this was only a marginal deterrent. In October 1802, Spanish officials in Texas sent panicked reports to their superiors in Mexico City that American flags were seen flying at Taovaya and Tawakoni villages on the Red River. The flags had apparently been obtained from the Caddos, whose villages were often the first stop for American traders crossing into Texas.³ After the Louisiana Purchase, which made the actual boundary between the United States and Spain even more debatable, many American traders felt even more emboldened to travel west to trade for horses with the Comanches, Caddos, and Wichitas. The border was ambiguous, and many American traders thought they could rely on help from the U.S. government if Spain accused them of trading illegally or tried to arrest them. Thus the trade traffic from places like Natchitoches up the Red River and onto the southern plains increased significantly after 1803.⁴ The Wichitas and Caddos benefited greatly from these contacts with American traders, because it allowed them to retain “middleman” roles in the Comanches’ trade network. Additionally, because Thomas Jefferson initially tried to claim that the western


³ F. Todd Smith, The Wichita Indians, p. 94.

⁴ F. Todd Smith, The Wichita Indians, p. 93-94. See especially his description of testimony in Spanish government documents about an American trader named only as “Sanders” who was known to be in the Red River villages.
boundary of the Louisiana Purchase was the Rio Grande, worried Spanish officials put a lot of
effort into courting the Wichitas and Caddos as potential allies against the Americans.\(^5\)

The mere rumor in early 1804 that Robert Ashley, one of Philip Nolan’s well-known
associates, was planning to return to the horse corrals Nolan had built near the Brazos River
caused local Spanish officials to muster 150 troops in hopes of intercepting his operations.
Ashley’s expedition never actually got started, partly because the rumors about his upcoming
departure had made the trip seem much more dangerous. However, the incident is still important,
not only because it shows how common American traders were becoming in the region, but also
because it shows how much Spain truly feared that the economic strength of the United States
would pull the Indians on the northern borders of its New World empire into the Americans’
orbit. Little did they realize that it was actually the Americans who were being pulled into the
Comanches’ commercial orbit.

In the summer of 1804, a large American trading party, led by two men that Spanish
reports named John Davis and Alexander Dauni, was camped at the Wichitas’ Red River villages.
The population of those villages had grown to about 2,000 people living in three villages on both
sides of the river. Spanish informants (probably Apaches or Tonkawas) had plenty of time to
learn details about the two men and the others who were probably with them, because the
American group stayed with the Wichitas to trade throughout the winter of 1804–1805. The
Wichitas were so pleased by the arrival of these traders that sometime in late 1804 they
dispatched a Caddo messenger to contact U.S. government representatives in Natchitoches to ask
\(^5\) In *The South in the New Nation*, Abernethy claims that “so anxious was the [Jefferson] Administration to
control the Gulf Coast east of the Mississippi and so little value did it attach to lands west of that river
that it made no attempt to occupy Texas but insisted on a specious claim to the land France had originally
occupied as far east as the Perdido River.” (p. 252).
the government to send more traders upriver. Thus Americans regularly initiated trade trips across the Mississippi River in the very early nineteenth century because it was extremely profitable to do so.

After the first Mexican revolution began in 1812, “the resulting confusion in the Southwest opened the floodgates for Comanche-U.S. commerce.” In *Comanche Empire*, Hamalainen describes three main access points used by Americans looking to trade with the Comanches. After the Wichita villages were abandoned because of Osage raids, new paths south of the Red River opened up directly into Comancheria for traders leaving Natchitoches and Nacogdoches. This overland route was popular because the old Red River paths were still threatened by Osage raiders. Additionally, the much more well documented Santa Fe Trail brought Americans west from St. Louis directly into the heart of Comancheria. Europeans had tried to find a reliable trade route from the Mississippi to Santa Fe since the late seventeenth century, but when Americans finally made that dream a reality in the early nineteenth century, many traders discovered that the Comanche trade fairs they found along the route could provide more profitable trading opportunities than Santa Fe itself. The trade on all fronts was so profitable that some Comanche bands began migrating south and east to take advantage of the opportunities provided by eastern and southern American connections. Hamalainen assumed this

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6 Dan L. Flores, *Journal of an Indian Trader: Anthony Glass and the Texas Trading Frontier, 1790–1810* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985), pp. 17-18. The Wichita might also have felt it was necessary to issue a direct request, because Davis and Dauni had been attacked by the Osages. Interested in the rumors of silver mines in the region, Davis and Dauni had constructed a rude cabin, probably in what are now known as the Wichita Mountains, over the winter. The cabin was destroyed by an Osage war party.

movement meant that the “Comanches no longer had to travel to trade; they could simply wait in their rancherias for American trade convoys to arrive.”

This was true to an extent, but the Comanches also continued to travel to American frontier outposts to trade, most notably a place in western Louisiana called Sulpher Fork, which in 1815 replaced Natchitoches as the headquarters of the U.S. Indian agent for the southwest, because the increased white population of the region had pushed the Indian populations so far west that Natchitoches was becoming an inconvenient location for federal agents to work in. In November 1816, John Jamison, the agent at Sulpher Fork, reported that Americans traded extensively with the Indians just west of his agency. Horses were still the main commodity acquired by Americans from the southern plains Natives. Most Americans who traveled to the region for any reason realized the commercial potential of connections to the plains tribes, like a young army officer named Reuben Ross, who was reported to be trading in Texas “with a huge encampment of Penatekas and Tawakonis on the Brazos River.” Ross conducted several expeditions in the region, finding more success in trading than in the U.S. army. White settlers who were pushing the boundaries of Arkansas Territory well into what is now Oklahoma complained in 1820 that “Traders from the United States” were trading the Comanches many guns in “exchange for horses & mules which these Indians [used] to plunder the Spanish settlements.” These Arkansas residents, who believed that upwards of 30,000 Comanches lived

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8 Hamalainen, p. 151.


10 John Jamison to William H. Crawford, November 20, 1816, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1

11 F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, p. 105.
on the southern plains, were concerned that because of this trade the Comanches were
“becoming quite expert in fire arms” and might transfer that expertise into attacks on their own
settlements.\textsuperscript{12}

The extent of American trading activities along the Red River during this period affected
tribes on the central and northern plains as well. In the summer of 1820, a U.S. exploratory
mission was sent to explore the central plains and find the headwaters of the Arkansas River in
the Rocky Mountains. Led by Stephen Long, members of the mission met dozens of different
plains Native groups, almost all of whom were friendly. In July, as they approached the
headwaters of the Arkansas, they met an Indian man and woman who belonged to a tribe the
mission’s interpreter called “Bad-hearts.” The Indian man told the group that he had just left a
gathering on the Arkansas River of Cheyennes, Arapahoes, “La Plays,” Kiowas, Shoshones, and
other Bad-hearts. These Indians had recently engaged in hostilities with the Spanish, and “the
plunder taken by the Indians consisting of horses etc. had been taken down to the settlers on Red
river & there sold to the American traders.”\textsuperscript{13}

It was clear to Long and other members of his expedition, several of whom kept diaries
recording the trip, that the Indians of the central plains were eager for more opportunities to trade
with Americans. After reaching the Rocky Mountains, the exploratory mission divided into two
groups, one to travel back east down the Arkansas River, and the other to travel south to find the
headwaters of the Red River. While searching for the Red River, the detachment led by Captain
John R. Bell met another party of friendly Kiowas, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Kaskaskias. The

\textsuperscript{12} James Miller to Calhoun, June 20, 1820, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian
Affairs, Roll #3; Southern Circuit of the Territory of Arkansas, Hempstead County, April Term 1820, ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} John R. Bell, \textit{The Journal of Captain John R. Bell: Official Journalist for the Stephen H. Long
Natives treated the group well, and the Kiowa chief gifted Bell a fine horse, and even offered the men the company of some of their own wives, a common aspect of hospitality among many Native groups.

Bell responded politely, giving the chiefs some tobacco and regretting that he had not come prepared to trade because the Indians seemed eager for further transactions. Some members of the party traded a few articles they were willing to part with for some buffalo meat, but they had few trade goods on hand. The Kiowas also gave Bell more information about their trade networks. He said that they were at peace with the Wichitas, which would explain why some Kiowas, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and others had traded on the Red River with Americans. However, they were at war with the “Kawas,” (which could have been wither the Kaws or the Kansas), the Ottoes, and the Osages. Thus, although they resided on the central plains, their access to American traders through St. Louis and Arkansas was blocked by the Osages and they sought connections to American traders to the south and the north. One of the Indians explained to Bell that “They trade with the Crow nation, for articles which that nation receive[s] in trade with the Mandans & other nations who are supplied by having traders reside among them.”

A few days later, Bell’s group met some Cheyenne warriors who said they were returning from raids on the Pawnees. Bell wrote, “The partizan or Chief of the Party, remarked, that we should be well treated by his party, that their nation was in want of traders among them–and did not know why the white people, had failed to visit them for some years past.” Thus throughout the journey, the members of the Long expedition continued to learn that Americans had been

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14 ibid, pp. 193-97.
15 ibid, p. 204.
16 ibid, p. 211.
trading among the plains Indians, and that those tribes were friendly and hoped even more
traders would come. Reports like these are especially important, because they were written by
men on government expeditions, whose reports were read by the highest officials back in
Washington, who despite this evidence continued to believe that the plains Natives were hostile
toward Americans, and were a problem that needed to be dealt with.17

As Bell’s party went further east, they realized that instead of finding the Red River, they
had not gone far south enough before turning east and they had picked up a tributary of the
Arkansas River instead. They realized their mistake when they encountered the villages of the
Osage chief Clermont, instead of finding the remnants of the Wichita villages that they were
expecting. Bell’s party, which suffered greatly from want of food in the latter stages of their
journey, were treated well by the Osages. However, Bell was surprised to discover an American
trading post on the Arkansas River not far downriver from the Osage villages at a place that
would later be called Three Forks because the Arkansas, Grand, and Verdisgris rivers all
converged there.18

Although the proprietor of the establishment, Hugh Glenn, was away when Bell’s party
arrived, the post was buzzing with activity. Outside of the post’s two main buildings, local Indian
women were “engaged in smoking deer skins.” Nearby, “a man engaged in constructing an
addition to the house” where Glenn lived. Many paths led up to the post, and there were plenty of

17 Bell’s two interpreters were Bijeau and Ladeau, French traders who lived among the Pawnees. See p. 217.

18 There were other trading posts in the region that Bell’s party did not even pass, one operated by a
French creole named Joseph Bourgie a few miles up the Verdisgris, and another operated by Americans
Henry Barbour and George W. Brand, also on the Verdisgris. Stan Hoig, Jesse Chisholm, p. 18. Not far
away, on the banks of the Illinois River, in what is today Sequoyah County, Oklahoma, a man named
Richard H. Bean had begun farming and opened a small trading post as well. See Elliott Coues, ed., The
boats available to ferry people across either of the three rivers.\textsuperscript{19} After leaving Glenn’s trading post, Bell’s party saw other signs of Anglo-American economic activities on the far southwestern frontier. The following evening “They stopped for the night at Bean’s salt works, where they were “politely treated by young Mr. Bean with a drink of butter-milk, more gratifying to our palates, than the sparkling champain.” Bell learned that Jesse Bean, who had a homestead forty miles down river from Belle Point, the site recently scoped out by Long as the best location for a new U.S. army base on the southwestern frontier, was the owner of the salt works. Bell wrote that Bean had been able to develop the salt works because “Genl. Miller” had given him permission because the salt works were “on public land,” indicating the common American view that essentially all land in the West was open for settlement, a view that was definitely not shared by many federal officials, especially those back east.\textsuperscript{20}

Other enterprising Americans regularly requested permission from various military, local, and federal authorities to open salt works and other similar ventures at various locations in the West. For example, in June 1817, a man named David Woods made a request to the recently-inaugurated president James Monroe to operate a salt works that was 500 miles up the Arkansas River from its confluence with the Mississippi. Woods wanted to transport the salt down the Arkansas, but he also thought that because the location of his proposed salt works was already so far west, he might be able to send shipments to Santa Fe. Woods and certainly others like him had deep knowledge about the economic possibilities in the West, revealing why many people (both white and Native) were so eager to be there.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Bell, \textit{The Journal of Captain John R. Bell}, pp. 269-70.

\textsuperscript{20} ibid, p. 272.

\textsuperscript{21} David Woods to James Monroe, June 22, 1817, \textit{Territorial Papers}, Vol. XV, pp. 284-86.
As Bell’s group approached Fort Smith, they also passed Native hunting parties going up the Arkansas and, about three miles from Belle Point, they saw “settlements of the Cherokees & some white families,” apparently living peacefully in close proximity to each other. On September 19, after reaching Bell Point and being discharged from the duties of the expedition, Bell headed for Cape Girardeau to catch a boat down the Mississippi. Along the way, he encountered many white families in scattered settlements throughout what is now Missouri and Arkansas. One night he stopped “at the house of a Mr. Bellingsly” who told Bell that he was from Kentucky and had “resided 10 years on the Arkansas River, the last 2 years at his present plantation,” growing corn and cotton, the latter crop produced at 800 pounds per acre.

Not every American trader or explorer who ventured deep into the West had a positive interaction with local Native groups. In 1807, an American named Joseph Bogy attempted to travel up the Arkansas River to trade with the Osages, but he was robbed along the way by the party of Choctaws. Bogy spent decades trying to get the federal government to compensate him for the losses he suffered at the hands of the Choctaws. Much later, a report reached Washington, D.C. in September 1819 that told the story of “an American and his son (a small boy)” who were taken captive by a party of Pawnee warriors, and then “robbed, striped, whipped and brought [as] prisoners to [the Pawnees’] village. However, another trader (whose nationality is not mentioned) eventually purchased the man and his son when he arrived at the Pawnee villages at a later date. It was a fairly common occurrence, especially when some Native groups felt that the ransom they could get from the U.S. government or another trader was better than what they

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23 ibid, pp. 284-85.
might gain by trading with some Americans who ventured into the territory.\textsuperscript{24} American traders John McKnight and Thomas James, who hoped to rescue their failing St. Louis-based trading house by taking $10,000 worth of goods to Santa Fe in May 1821, were accosted by a large party of Comanches who essentially extorted goods from the Americans before letting them continue on to Santa Fe.\textsuperscript{25}

In the 1820s, many Euro-American traders hoped that the Osages were no longer a threat, and began trying to make trading trips up the Red River again. One such venture was led by Antoine Barraque, a French emigrant who had married a Quapaw woman. Barraque was accompanied by his Quapaw relatives on the journey. Departing in the fall of 1823, Barraque’s party made it to the confluence of the Blue and Red Rivers by early November without incident. While encamped there, they met a small group of American hunters led by a man named Curtis Wellburn.\textsuperscript{26} It is unclear whether the two groups joined up on purpose or found each other by accident, but they camped together and planned to continue traveling west together. Before they could do so, however, the party was discovered by a large group of Osage warriors who were returning from raiding Caddo and probably Wichita settlements south of the Red River. According to a report later given by Barraque to U.S. army general Matthew Arbuckle, the Osage warriors taunted his group, following them for several days without making any attempt to conceal themselves. Finally, on November 17, the Osages struck, killing five members of the party and wounding two others.

\textsuperscript{24} Benjamin O’Fallon to the Secretary of War, Sept. 25, 1819, \textit{Territorial Papers}, Vol. XV, p. 563.

\textsuperscript{25} Thomas James, \textit{Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans}, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1962; reprint of original 1846 edition).

\textsuperscript{26} Or Wellborn, Wilbourne. His name is spelled many different ways in the sources in which he appears.
The survivors limped back east, arriving at Fort Smith nearly two weeks later to tell their story. Hearing Wellburn and Barraque’s complaints and demands for compensation for the losses they had suffered, Matthew Arbuckle was unsympathetic. Arbuckle was quickly becoming one of the most seasoned military commanders on the southwestern frontier, and he had seen first hand that many of the problems in the region were caused by white people who insisted on crossing boundaries that they were not supposed to. Barraque made several attempts to collect compensation for his losses from the U.S. government, but his claims were consistently denied. Most government officials might have agreed in principle that white Americans should be able to live and travel anywhere they wanted within the boundaries of the nation, but if pressed to pay for clearly poor decisions, officials often balked because ultimately they had a different perception of how westward migration should proceed.27

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Euro-American traders in the trans-Mississippi West were quickly outnumbered by those who moved into the region with plans to settle permanently. Even before the Louisiana Purchase, many Americans (like Daniel Clark) had been willing to move into Spanish Louisiana because they saw significant economic opportunities there. In one of John Sibley’s first reports to Thomas Jefferson, he had noted that there were rapidly growing white settlements just to the west of New Orleans because of the fertile grazing lands to be found there. He stated that in 1802, over 3,000 bales of cotton had been shipped down the Red River into New Orleans from the increasing number of farms

northwest of New Orleans. Even more impressive to Sibley was the presence of over a hundred sugar plantations in Louisiana on the west side of the Mississippi.28

In February 1807, Missouri territorial official Joseph Browne received reports that the Shawnees and Delawares who had settled near Cape Girardeau were concerned about the influx of white settlers. They hoped to get a handle on the problem “lest those intrusions, if too long unnoticed might become actual claims injurious to them,” indicating that the number of white intruders was probably still low. However, they worried that if these white intruders were allowed to pass through without the Shawnees and Delawares saying anything that their “Silence or inaction should be construed into a consent,” and they might eventually be forced off their lands by those white migrants.29

As time went on, some white settlers grew more aggressive in their attempts to push Indian populations out of lands that were deemed to have high agricultural value. For example, in May 1809, Sibley reported that the Biloxi Indians, “who in the year 1805 lived on Bayou Beauf in the County of the Rapides on lands they Inherited from their Ancestors, have Since been removed from their Lands by a Company of Individuals who claims them under a purchase said to have been made of the Indians while Louisiana was in the hands of the Government of Spain & sanctioned by it.”30 Sibley seemed indignant that nothing had been done to investigate whether the claims of the “company of individuals” about purchasing the lands from the Biloxis


during the era of Spanish control was actually true. Because the Biloxis had lived on the lands of “Bayou Beauf” for generations, he believed that they deserved such consideration. Federal officials in Washington obviously did not agree, demonstrating some of the disconnect of perspective that commonly existed between federal agents in the East and those who were out in the field. In April of 1811, William Clark felt the same, reporting to James Madison about two bands of Shawnees and some Delawares who frequently approached his office in St. Louis, asking about securing “a permanent Tract” of land where “the White people might not encroach on them.”\footnote{William Clark to James Madison, from St. Louis, April 10, 1811, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Reel #1} They reported that white settlers crossing the Mississippi harassed them and tried to sell them alcohol, which the Shawnees knew would only cause even more problems. Clark believed that the federal government should take action to prevent such encroachments by white settlers.

However, it was constantly difficult for federal officials to do so, even if they wanted. White settlers employed many other means besides selling alcohol to Indians to try to obtain land in the West. For example, one of the most common tactics used by white migrants was to claim that they had been given a land grant in Louisiana Territory during the period of French or Spanish ownership. Records from the French and Spanish administrations of Louisiana had been very haphazardly kept and were not always readily accessible to U.S. officials who arrived after 1803. This made it easy for people, even those who had arrived well after the U.S. acquisition of Louisiana, to claim that they had been given a grant by a French or Spanish official at some time in the past. Indeed, much of the first two decades of U.S. administration of the region was spent...
trying to sort out all the various land claims that were made by both white and Native inhabitants of the region.\textsuperscript{32}

Although whites in the West made land claims based on supposed grants that they had received from the Spanish government, the vast majority of white settlers made no such pretensions to legality, and simply settled wherever they wanted. There were some Americans who went west because they believed that they had a right to settle on any lands within the territorial boundaries of the United States, regardless of the rights of the Indian tribes who lived there or the federal government’s future plans for those lands. The rights of white males who wanted to be property owners were supposed to trump all other considerations.

Although the Caddos and Wichitas had welcomed the arrival of white traders at their villages, the arrival of whites who intended to settle in the southwest proved detrimental to their interests. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, there were two main American settlements on the upper Red River that troubled local Native groups. The first was a small collection of farms and other buildings on the north bank of the river that was called Pecan Point. After the establishment of that settlement, other white settlers began moving west from Arkansas, creating a municipality that would eventually be dubbed “Miller County.” They hoped that it would be incorporated as the westernmost county of Arkansas Territory. White settlers scattered through the region, which encompassed a large area that included portions of three present-day counties in southwestern Arkansas and southeastern Oklahoma.

\textsuperscript{32} See “An Act Re Claims to Land in the Territories of Orleans and Louisiana,” passed by Congress on March 3, 1807, \textit{Territorial Papers}, Vol. XIV, pp. 102-105. [can insert some of the citizen petitions for more examples]
The Pecan Point settlement was primarily on the south side of the Red River, according to letters written by Sibley. Settlement there dated from at least as early as 1811. There was also a settlement called Jonesborough, also on the south side of the Red River, that was even further upstream than Pecan Point. There was another white settlement near the confluence of the Red and Kiamichi Rivers. Another settlement was called “Mound Prairie,” and was located near present-day Washington, Arkansas as well as another near present-day Fulton, Arkansas.

According to Dianna Everett, “Although the U.S. government repeatedly tried to remove some of the settlers, by late 1820 the American population numbered in the thousands.”

The American settlements on the Red River, full of not necessarily friendly people who also hunted regularly in the region, divided the Wichitas from their Caddo neighbors who had been instrumental in facilitating the trade with the American factor and other traders at Natchitoches. These American settlers were different from the traders that the Wichitas had found it so easy to make friends with; not many of these Americans wanted to trade and become friends. They claimed the land as their own, started farming it, and considered any Indians who came into the region to be potentially life-threatening intruders. By the early 1820s, the white population of Pecan Point would reach over 1,500.

From places like Pecan Point and Natchitoches, white Americans ventured even further west. Nacogdoches, Texas, which had been an important hub of illegal American trading activity in the late eighteenth century, became a focal point for American “filibustering” activities in the

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34 Antonio Martinez to the Viceroy, December 17, 1819; ibid, December 24, 1819; ibid, February 18, 1820, all in Taylor, ed., *The Letters of Antonio Martinez*, pp. 288-89; 304-05.
southwest, especially as Spain’s control over the northern portions of its empire continued to weaken in the 1810s. Unlike the settlers of places like Miller County, who sought incorporation into existing U.S. territorial governments, some Americans sought to create entirely new spaces of sovereignty by carving out new nations in the seemingly vast space of the old southwest. These filibustering efforts drew the condemnation of both U.S. and Spanish officials, but neither government exercised any sovereignty in the region that allowed them to stop it.\footnote{35}{John Sibley to William Eustis, May 10, 1812, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1.}

Not all filibusters had grand dreams of new nations, however. Most usually resembled the unprincipled people Browne and Sibley had already described. In 1818, for example, then-secretary of war John C. Calhoun received a report about “[t]he white people” who were “encroaching on that delightful hunting ground” that lay west of Nacogdoches and the Sabine River, between the Trinity and Brazos Rivers, which would be as far west as present-day Fort Worth. The white hunters who had essentially taken over the region were “in the most wanton manner . . . destroying the game” which could have drastic consequences for the local Native populations and cause hostilities that Calhoun believed would upset the federal government’s plans for the region.\footnote{36}{Trimble to Calhoun, August 7, 1818, in Morse, ed., A Report to the Secretary of War.}

Many federal officials had poor opinions of the white Americans who were migrating west. From the perspective of U.S. agents, these Americans were squatting on lands in an irritatingly haphazard manner and upending plans for the eventual orderly sale of public lands once the western Indians had been pacified and the eastern Indians settled in the West. In 1806 Joseph Browne described the majority of those Americans who had migrated west of the
Mississippi near the territorial capital of St. Louis as “in general a very illiterate set of Men, who had been driven by their Debts or their Crimes from the American States.” Some of them had even come before the U.S. acquired the territory, hoping to be free from justice by living within the boundaries of Spain. Browne referred to them in terms that federal officials might also have used to describe Indians, stating, “They lead a semy-savage life, dependent on the chase and a miserable Agriculture.”

John Sibley was also critical of some white settlers in the West. For example, in May 1812, Sibley reported to the secretary of war that some Americans had recently taken over a large swath of territory between Natchitoches and the Sabine River in Texas, making it a place where very few people dared to venture. The group was “a band of bad men from different parts of the United States . . . who put the Indians in fear.” He also described them as “intruders and robbers,” who were “well armed and desperate.” Sibley proposed expanding the jurisdiction of U.S. law and military authority to the boundary of the Sabine River (even though this boundary remained disputed with Spain) as a way of dealing with this group of outlaws. In addition to the group near the Sabine, there was another party of outlaws of “the same Character” who were “Establishing themselves at the Pecan Point on Red River.” Sibley believed this group to be of even more concern, because they were harassing the local Caddo Indians and they “encourage[d] and Protect[ed] slaves who ran away from their owners” in Louisiana. Pecan Point thus quickly


38 John Sibley to William Eustis, May 10, 1812, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1.
became one of the most troublesome places of white encroachment in the West, and played a  
significant role in preventing later removals from being completed when and where U.S.  
government officials desired.  

In 1813, William Lovely, the agent to the western Cherokees, wrote to his superior,  
Return J. Meigs, that near the Cherokee settlements in Arkansas were “the worst banditi” who  
were “all the white folks.” These white squatters had moved west because they needed to  
“escape to this Country” and were “guilty of the most horrid crimes.” Most reports from the West  
recorded Indian hostility toward Americans, but Lovely reported that the white squatters in  
Arkansas were “depredating on the Osages & other tribes, taking off 30 horses at a time, which  
will show the necessity of giving from protection to this place.”  

White hunters were a problem  
as well as white settlers. In August 1818, reports reaching Washington about “[t]he white people”  
who were “encroaching on that delightful hunting ground” that lay to the west of the Sabine  
River all the way out to the plains. Trimble reported that white hunters were “in the most wanton  
manner . . . destroying the game.”  

Frustrated federal officials in the West sometimes made an effort to remove white settlers  
who had settled on lands that still clearly belonged to Indians. The government usually referred  
to those as lands to which the Indian title had not been “extinguished.” Most officials did not  
disagree with whites settling on Indian lands so much as they objected to having to deal with the  
conflicts that they believed necessarily would (and usually did) erupt when whites intruded on  
Indian lands. For example, in December 1806, John B. Treat reported that some white intruders  

40 William L. Lovely to Return J. Meigs, August 6, 1813, quoted in Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, p. 35.  
41 Trimble to Calhoun, in Morse, ed., *A Report to the Secretary of War*. 
had recently been ordered to remove from the White River area, where they had been disturbing the Cherokee and Delaware settlers who lived there.42

When Meriwether Lewis became governor of the Missouri Territory in 1806, he was irritated by all the problems white intruders were causing. He therefore issued a proclamation to all the white people “at and near the Cherokee and Delaware Towns, on the river St. Francis” telling them that they had to leave within a specified time. However, Lewis clearly cared less about the preservation of Shawnee and Delaware sovereignty than he did about the possibility that such intruders would upset “the peace and tranquility so happily subsisting between the United States and those tribes.” More importantly, like others both before and after him, Lewis viewed the white settlers as intruders on the land of the United States, not the land of the Shawnees and the Delawares. Throughout the document, even though he mentions the intrusion locations as “at and near” the Indian settlements, Lewis described the actual land as being “the public lands of the United States,” thus denying any Indian titles to land.43

After taking office as the secretary of war and receiving numerous reports from western agents about the problems caused on the frontier by white settlers, John C. Calhoun wrote to western military commander William A. Trimble, asking for his “opinion on the best mode to prevent the encroachment of our citizens, on lands belonging to the Indians, on our south-western frontier.” Settlers were a problem, but so were hunters and traders. Calhoun sought information about ways “to prevent our people from passing into the Buffaloe country, either for the destruction of game, or to traffic with the Indians, without license.” Calhoun recognized that


43 Proclamation by Governor Lewis, April 6, 1809, published in the *Missouri Gazette*, April 12, 1809.
the successful implementation of a federal removal policy depended as much on the restraint of frontier settlement by whites as it did on convincing the Indians to move west.44

Trimble thought the problem of white encroachment on western Native populations was so great that it required a radical solution. He correctly believed that the federal government did not have the capability to actually prevent whites from settling illegally on Indian lands. Having traveled in the West himself, he knew the great lack of federal infrastructure and manpower the region, so he “suggested whether it might not be expedient to authorize the Indians to seize and deliver, to the civil or military authorities of the United States, persons found trespassing on their lands; and to authorize Indians under certain restrictions, to give testimony against persons so offending.” There is no evidence to suggest that Calhoun implemented Trimble’s suggestion, or even seriously considered it. The idea was drastic—allowing Indians to round up any whites they claimed were trespassing on their lands and then let those Indians testify in court against U.S. citizens would cause an uproar on the frontier. Calhoun could probably only imagine the nightmare of outcries from white settlers, not to mention the likelihood that this would cause significant white/Indian violence.

Officials writing from Washington usually took definitive stances about how they thought white intruders should be dealt with. Those federal representatives who were actually the West, however, often took a view that was much more sympathetic to the white settlers. A lot of the men who received government appointments in the West were those who already lived there, in places like Tennessee and Kentucky, and so they understood very well the motivations and ambitions of the white settlers they were supposed to be displacing. Therefore, as much as

44 Calhoun to Trimble, Nov. 1818.
officials like Calhoun might have wanted to remove whites they perceived as intruders on Indian or U.S. public lands, actual enforcement of removal declarations often depended on the cooperation of military leaders in the West. Many of these men often declined to enforce orders, sometimes because they had been issued by civilian officials, but also because they disagreed with the idea that white American citizens could not simply settle wherever they pleased. Captain George Armstead, who was put in charge of the military command at the Arkansas Post in 1809, believed in the latter position. He thought that his military position gave him the authority to impose his views about Indian lands and white settlement.

Armstead thought it was “unconstitutional to say that those Cherikies on this side of the Mississippi shall have land to live on and it is not in the power of the [government] to support them.” The Indians essentially had no rights at all, he opined, stating that “the white people [were] at liberty to settle where they please.” Armstead promised he would use all the power available to him to prevent civilian authorities like James McFarlane, who had been sent to Arkansas with orders to remove intruders from Cherokee settlements on the St. Francis River, from taking any action against white settlers anywhere. Armstead also gave his support to a local white man, named only as Mr. Hunt, who the Cherokees had complained about to U.S. authorities. Hunt was in the habit of coming into the Cherokee villages to kill cattle that he claimed as his own property. The Cherokees told McFarlane that Hunt went around the region “telling them [the Cherokees] that he will soon have them out of the Country that the land they live on is his.” Hunt and some others must have previously been removed from Cherokee lands, because Hunt also told the Cherokees that the “others that have been removed from that place”
had already “marked a greate many trees as boundery lines,” indicating that they believed it was
only a matter of time before the whites would be able to move back onto the Cherokees’ land.  

McFarlane wrote that local militia members shared Hunt’s and Armstead’s views, and
thus could not “be depended on” to enforce laws issued by the territorial governor. Additionally,
McFarlane felt that time was of the essence, because white settlements already extended an
additional 150 miles west up the Arkansas River than the Cherokee settlements near the Arkansas
Post. Settlement by whites increased rapidly in subsequent years. Stephen Long, who was
searching for the best location for a U.S. army fort on the southwestern frontier, also reported
about the extent of American settlements on the south side of the Arkansas River by January
1818. He wrote that “The American settlements . . . have of late become considerably
numerous.” The white settlers were coming “from various parts of the United States, but
principally from Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Illinois Territory,” or people who were
already familiar with frontier life. In total, they probably numbered at least three thousand. Long
expressed sympathy for the settlers, stating that the “settlements were made under the
supposition that the land was the property of the United States,” not realizing that the lands they
had chosen were still claimed by various Indian groups. Long thought that the settlers were there
“to acquire an honest livelihood,” and since they had not been resident there long enough to be
“able to realize any profits from the cultivation of the Ground,” it would be a great hardship if
the federal government forced them to move.  

McFarlane, Long, and others thus realized that

46 Stephen Long to Brig. Gen. A Smith, Jan 30, 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating
to Indian Affairs, Roll #2.
the idea that removal west of the Mississippi would remove Native people from the white frontier was debunked even before the first decade of the nineteenth century came to a close.

Interestingly, white squatters and Native refugees were not the only people who saw the trans-Mississippi west as a place to achieve independence. Christopher McPherson, an emancipated slave and advocate of abolition, wrote to Secretary of State James Monroe in December 1816 to ask if he could “purchase from Government a territory of Country on the Missouri & Mississippi Rivers.” He wanted the territory to be “for the Free people of Colour in this happy Union.” Many free blacks who lived in Virginia and North Carolina, he reported, were “ready to sell their property in order to remove thither immediately.” McPherson thought that it was “doubtless” that once such a movement began, it would “become general.” He made sure, however, to emphasize that they would migrate “without Gun or sword” and hoped to do so “under the protection of the General Government–say perhaps in the ratio of one soldier to ten persons.” McPherson’s request was denied, but the fact that he made it illustrates the variety of possibilities that many different people saw in the West.

Monroe’s dismissal of McPherson’s request shows that the government already had a very specific vision for how the “open” spaces in the West should ultimately be used. Officials back in Washington still believed that they could control both Native and white migration into the West, and likely had a hard time imagining allowing free blacks to move there in large numbers as well. In February 1816, then-secretary of war William H. Crawford reiterated to William Clark that because he was the governor of Missouri Territory, he had the authority to issue orders to “the military power of the territory.” Crawford told Clark that both he and

President James Madison were extremely concerned about “[i]ntruders upon the Indian lands and upon the public lands.” Although these were two different legal problems, the squatters themselves were “to be treated in the same same manner.” Madison was counting on “the most prompt and perfect execution of the proclamation” telling all white intruders on public and Indian lands that they had to leave or they would be forcibly removed by the U.S. military. Ultimately, for Crawford and Madison, “The premature occupancy of the public lands can be viewed only as an invasion of the sovereign rights of the United States.” The eagerness of white settlers had to “be repressed by the most prompt and energetic measures.”

Accordingly, Clark issued a proclamation similar to one issued earlier that winter in which he stated that “white persons emigrating from the settlements of this territory as well as from the neighbouring territories and States” would no longer be tolerated if they continued to intrude on Indian lands. Clark not only emphasized the trouble that these movements caused for the government when conflicts broke out on the frontier because “the original aggression . . . proceeded from ourselves,” but also stated that because the U.S. was a government “founded in justice” it was obligated to “extend its protection to the Native inhabitants within its limits.” Thus Clark felt that he was trying to be just to Native people, even while he was denying their nationhood by asserting the ultimate sovereignty of the United States over their lands.

However, a few months later, Clark reported back that the orders he had issued had been completely ignored by the white settlers. There were about 200 families, which probably amounted to well over 500 people, settled on the upper Arkansas River on lands that the federal

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government believed were still legally occupied by local Natives. Even though Clark had
previously been frustrated by the actions of these and other white squatters, a petition that the
families on the Arkansas River sent him seems to have swayed his opinion of them. Clark told
Crawford that the white Americans on the Arkansas were “peaceable, honest & indus
terous” and
deserved to stay.

In the petition, which Clark sent along with his letter to Crawford, the white settlers
argued that one of the reasons they deserved to stay was because they had “been annexed to the
County of Arkansa and by its officers assessed, and with pleasure paid those taxes imposed on us
by our Government.” It would have been completely unjust for the federal government to force
the taxpaying residents of a state to leave their homes. In a bid for sympathy, the petitioners also
invoked the “hardships and difficulties and provations” that they had endured while “maintaining
a settlement in such a wilderness County.” Finally, the petitioners also pled ignorance, stating
that when they had moved to the region four years prior they had taken “every means to obtain
correct information relative to the nature of Indian Claims to this country and was informed as
we supposed from the most authentic source that we were a considerable distance within the
boundaries of the United States, under those considerations we quietly and industriously pursued
our occupations of husbandry and many times were almost ready to sink from our pursuits under
those many oppressions to which we were exposed from our situation.”

In the end, it seems that

the petition worked, and no serious further efforts were made by Clark, other federal officials, or
the military to remove white settlers from the region.

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50 Petition from Arkansas River settlers to William Clark, undated and enclosed in his letter to Crawford
But recognizing that this might set a bad precedent, even as he appealed for an exception, Clark recommended the construction of a military post on the Arkansas to prevent further white settlement in the region for the time being. Acknowledging the problem, Clark also described the other white settlements in addition to those on the Arkansas that were in question: “At this time there are three Settlements made on the Osage lands above where the line will strike the Arkansaw, one about 300 miles, one 126 & one 100 miles above the Cheriekee Towns.”51 In addition to other Arkansas valley settlements, Clark reported that “The imogration to this Territory (principally to the Missouri River & Mississippi above this) has been for the last six months very considerable, and very rapidly increasing—and as I am informed composed of respectable & welthy men anxious to procure some of the public Lands.”

Eventually, most federal officials realized that their efforts to remove white squatters would almost always be in vain. Negotiating land cessions from Indians to accommodate white squatters looked like an easier solution. In the late 1810s, Crawford authorized a group of western Indian agents to hold negotiations for land cession with various tribes west of the Mississippi. In one of his letters of instruction, Crawford told the commissioners that it was important to obtain Indians lands even before they were “required for settlement” by American citizens because “[e]xperience has proved the extreme difficulty of preventing [white] persons from making settlements upon the most remote points.” Crawford hoped that by obtaining preemptive land cessions, the government could prevent the armed conflicts that often resulted from whites settling on or too close to Indian lands. It was vastly more expensive for the federal government to fight wars with Indians started by the thoughtless actions of some citizens than to

obtain land cessions, which could often be gotten cheaply through use of deceptive negotiating tactics. Crawford’s strategy of obtaining land cessions earlier than he thought should be necessary also indicates that he believed any efforts on the part of the federal government to prevent whites from illegally settling on public and Indian lands, or to remove them once they got there, would ultimately fail.52

But even though federal officials capitulated to settlers’ demands and began obtaining western land cessions, it was not enough to satiate white Americans’ appetite for Indian lands. One of the principal surveyors of public lands in the region, William Rector, reported in 1816 that more than 3.1 million acres between the Arkansas and St. Francis rivers in the southern portion of the territory (in what is now the state of Arkansas) was being marked off and sold rapidly to white settlers. Rector’s report also reveals the dangers of making exceptions to rules, as Clark had asked the secretary of war to do for some of the Arkansas River settlers. Unlike some other U.S. officials who looked on these eager white settlers as “semi-savages,” Rector said most of them were “Men of respectability, property & enterprize.” However, the flood of emigrants was so great, that Rector did not believe there was any way to stop people from settling on lands that were technically in the public domain, but that had not been surveyed and priced. This was frustrating to Rector because “there is so many precedents of Pre-emption rights . . . that these folks who are now improperly settling on the lands of the United States will become very numerous & Clamorous for the same favors from Government that others have received under similar Circumstances.” Because these people made settlements before they were supposed to, they usually ended up costing the government money as officials tried to work out

the details of the pre-emption claims. If they had simply waited and legally purchased surveyed lands “the sale of these lands [would] immediately produce to the U.S. a large Sum of Money.”\textsuperscript{53} Rector was right to be worried about settlers pushing the westward boundaries too far and invoking pre-emption rights. As Rector was doing his surveys in eastern and central Missouri, reports were coming in that white settlements had been extended up the Missouri River from its confluence with the Mississippi more than two hundred miles. Settlers at a place called Boone’s Lick even had the audacity to complain that their location was so remote, it was inconvenient for them to travel to St. Louis to prove their pre-emption claims, and so they wanted a representative of the government to come to them.\textsuperscript{54}

Missouri’s territorial legislature was increasingly vocal about their constituents’ desire for all Indian claims within the territory to be dealt with. In January 1817, the Missouri legislature issued a statement saying that they had recently been surprised to learn that “the remnant of the Quapaw Tribe of Indians” had the “pretension” to claim territory “between the mouth of the Arkansas to the Canadian,” which had developed “a significant white population.” This location would have been fairly close to present-day Fort Smith, but it was territory well within the boundaries of what would become the state of Oklahoma. The members of the assembly were indignant that “the settlers [had] been ordered off” by William Clark, insisting that the claims of the 160 Quapaws they said remained in the region “had [no] foundation in equity or Justice to the extent described.” They also accused the Quapaws of lying, stating that the Indians had “never pretended to claim more than about fifty Miles square until within about two years” ago.”


Ultimately, they wanted the federal government to rescind the order for the settlers to remove and to pay off the Quapaws, perhaps giving them the 50 square miles the assemblymen believed they might be entitled to, and make sure the Indians did not trouble the white settlers again.\footnote{Resolution of the Territorial Assembly of Missouri, Jan. 2, 1817, \textit{Territorial Papers}, Vol. XV pp. 224-25.}

A few weeks later, the Missouri legislature complained to federal officials that “the Prosperity and population of the Counties of St. Genevieve and Cape Gerardeau,” two rapidly growing white settlements on the western bank of the Mississippi, “has been greatly retarded and much inconvenience has occurred . . . from the nature and uncertain quantity of land claimed by the Shawanese and Delware Indians.” However, their other statements show that the white settlers of the region were not at all confused about the actual boundaries of the Shawnee and Delaware lands claims. Rather, they were concerned that the forty by twenty mile section of land where the Delawares and Shawnees lived contained “a large portion of the best land in both Counties.” The assemblymen claimed that some white residents had received those lands as a grant during the Spanish period, and the rights of the white citizens should be given precedent over those of the Shawnees and Delawares. However, “if it should appear that [the Indians] are entitled to . . . the lands,” they requested “that Steps may be taken to obtain the aforesaid title from those Indians by an exchange of other lands in some more remote part of the Territory which is better adapted to Indian pursuits.”

Here is evidence of how early the concept of land “exchange” as the best means for Indian removal had pervaded the thinking of not only federal officials, but local territorial assemblymen in the West as well. Also interesting is the evidence this provides of something that is missing from the historiography of Indian removal: a discussion of how early Indian removal
began in the West. Groups of Shawnees and Delawares who had already made numerous migrations over the course of the previous century to end up on the western banks of the Mississippi were not far west enough for the white settlers who crossed the Mississippi by the tens of thousands in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The Missouri assemblymen called for them to be moved to a more “remote” location, but what would ever be remote enough? The extent of white westward migration during this period meant that removal policies would affect many western Native people at the same time as those in the East.

However, some U.S. officials were more successful at enforcing orders for the removal of white squatters. John Jamison, who was one of Sibley’s successors at the far southwestern U.S. Indian agency, was also very concerned about white settlers encroaching on Indian lands in the region. He described them as “Hordes of hunters and licentious traders” who invaded Indian settlements on the upper Red River. Although Indians often welcomed U.S. traders, some brought more trouble than the goods they sold were worth, and Jamison reported that “the Indians have frequently complained” about the presence of some white traders. Taking the situation seriously, Jamison called on the U.S. army “for a force Sufficient to expel these intruders.” He planned to depart with a company of U.S. troops soon after dispatching his letter to the secretary of war, going “as far as Pecan point, and I hope we shall be able to teach some of those intruders what sort of respect ought to be paid the laws of our Country.”

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Just over a month later, Jamison reported the outcome of his mission. The military had successfully removed “near a dozen Families” residing near Pecan Point (or Na Nat So Ho Village, as Jamison said it was called by the Caddos) “on the lands claimed by the Caddos, and of which they had heretofore so much complained.” The white families “were immediately removed to the North side of Red River.” Additionally, “several unlicensed traders” residing in villages of Cherokees, Delawares, and Conchattas were “arrested, and their goods and merchantdize seized,” although some were able to escape before the army detachment arrived.58

In 1820, when Missouri became a state (only the second state after Louisiana to be formed out of territory west of the Mississippi River) the legislature became even more aggressive in their attempts to remove all Indians from the new states’ boundaries. The representatives in the legislature called on the U.S. Congress “to use their best exertions to procure the extinguishment of the Indian Title To all lands within the Limits of this State.” Missourians also wanted Congress “to prevent the admission of any Indian Tribe to Settle within the Limits of State of Missouri” that might be in the process of being removed from the east. Native people were no longer welcome in the region that just a decade before had seemed like an ideal location for tribes migrating and removing across the Mississippi.59 Thomas Hart Benton, who would soon become Missouri’s first senator, was in favor of this proposal, using rumors that the Osages and Kickapoos were attacking white settlers in the state as a reason that all Indians should be removed from the state.60

Chapter two described early Native migration into the old Southwest, and how Native people took advantage of the various economic opportunities that awaited them there. In this chapter, I show that white Americans flooded into the trans-Mississippi west simultaneously with Native migrants. Neither of these migratory flows was in any way controlled by federal officials, who were often frustrated that the movements of these diverse groups of people interfered with their plans for an orderly advance of the American frontier and the implementation of Indian removal. However, in subsequent decades, later generations of U.S. officials would be mostly ignorant of the deep American trade connections that were developed in the West in the early nineteenth century, connections that would significantly affect later attempts to implement removal policies. Additionally, even though federal officials were already in the process of confronting the myriad of problems arising out of white encroachment of western Natives’ lands, they continued to promote removal policies as the best and only way for Indians to be protected from the bad influences and problems caused by white frontiersmen. More importantly, federal officials continued to conceive of themselves as having the power necessary to implement removal policies in the way that they desired, despite a large body of information arriving from the West that proved otherwise.
Federal policies regarding the early-nineteenth-century West were focused on asserting U.S. sovereignty over the massive Louisiana Territory and the Indian populations that lived there so that the government could use western lands for removal, white settlers, and other purposes as it saw fit. Federal officials initially went about this assertion of sovereignty in two main ways, both of which were significantly different, but were equally influenced by the belief that despite the large Native presence in the West, the United States had the right and the power to assert sovereignty over the region and all its people. One important strategy employed by federal officials was to try to draw Native nations into a U.S. sphere of influence by acting like an ally and providing trade opportunities, much as previous colonial powers in the region had done. In early nineteenth century Louisiana Territory, this approach was best exemplified by U.S. agent John Sibley.

Sibley, more than most U.S. officials in the West, recognized how much power many western Native groups wielded, and thus chose to act like the ally that many of those groups desired. In the borderlands West, an alliance with the U.S. was potentially game-changing for Native nations that faced a variety of pressures resulting from colonial encroachment. His actions lead to many successful U.S. encounters and relationships with western Native groups, although much of this history was ultimately forgotten by U.S. officials when removal efforts increased in the 1830s. However, Sibley’s time as a U.S. Indian agent in the southwest is also important because it shows that although most federal agents in the West received similar instructions, how
each agent implemented those instructions varied widely. The federal government was not a monolithic entity in the early nineteenth century, and the little power that it did exercise depended heavily on the characters of the men entrusted with the responsibility of implementing those policies.

The other way U.S. officials tried to assert sovereignty, exemplified by the actions of William Clark, was to force, cajole, or trick Native nations into signing land cession treaties, thereby removing all potential barriers to any claims that the U.S. did not hold “official” legal title to the lands in Louisiana it had purchased. Complete ownership would allow federal officials to finish asserting sovereignty over eastern Indian nations by removing them to the West. Because the federal government feared the West was filling up too quickly, land cessions, land exchanges, and forced removals actually began in the West as soon as they did in the East. In fact, the idea of land exchange, one of the most important components of the Indian removal project, was developed as a result of U.S. efforts to control Native movements into the trans-Mississippi West that had already occurred in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Even though the boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase remained vague, and federal officials knew that they did not have complete knowledge about Indian and white land claims in the West, they leapt headlong into the process of implementing policies designed to complete the removal of all Native people from the east. Thus the U.S. tried to control the West like it did the east, not recognizing that the realities of political and economic power in the western borderlands would not allow them to dominate western Native nations in the same way they were becoming dominant over eastern Native nations.
Both of these strategies for asserting sovereignty played an important role in the outcome of federal Indian policies in the nineteenth century and they are revelatory of the haphazard operation of the federal government in the West. Federal policies were implemented by different men in different places, because the situation looked very different depending on the place one stood and the direction one looked to find, in Meriwether Lewis’s words, “the heart of what we carelessly and familiarly call the Indian country.”

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Although essentially all federal officials appointed to administrative positions in the West firmly believed in the project of asserting U.S. sovereignty over the Louisiana region, different officials went about asserting that sovereignty in different ways. This was especially true in the first decade after the Louisiana Purchase, when U.S. control was the most tenuous and Britain and Spain still posed real potential threats to U.S. sovereignty. John Sibley was one official who was interested in building relationships with the western tribes, viewing trade and diplomacy as the best ways to achieve U.S. dominance in the southwestern borderlands. Sibley’s tenure as an Indian agent in the southwest also demonstrates the deep levels of historical amnesia under which the federal government operated in later decades. Federal officials in the 1830s overlooked past events, much to their own detriment as they became even more fervent in their efforts to complete Indian removal from the eastern United States. Little of the vast amounts of information that Sibley provided about the southwestern tribes, especially the Comanches, was actually used to any purpose by the federal government. More troubling, Sibley’s extensive efforts to build trade and diplomatic relationships with the plains groups seem to have been

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completely forgotten after Thomas Jefferson’s administration. Federal officials in later decades, especially the 1830s, acted as if they knew nothing about the Comanches or other plains tribes, treating their potential threat to the removal project as a new problem. Had the federal government remembered and acted on Sibley’s suggestions for developing trade ties and making peace treaties with the Comanches earlier in the nineteenth century, the situation in the old Southwest would have looked much different in the 1830s.

Sibley served one of the longest terms of any Indian agent in the West, from December 1804 until his abrupt dismissal on January 25, 1815. However, like most agents in the West in the nineteenth century, he became involved in speculation schemes near his agency, buying significant amounts of land, not all in a necessarily legal way, which he used for farms, a salt works, and cattle ranching. Even though Sibley engaged in speculative activities that the federal government tried to discourage its agents from becoming involved in, Sibley seems to have taken his job seriously. He worked hard to build and manage relationships with local Indian tribes, especially the Caddos and the Comanches, and tried to develop the region’s economic potential through trade. Sibley worked as an agent during the era of the “factory system,” which was based on the idea that peace between the United States and Indian nations was best achieved through creating friendly trade relationships.

The U.S. government recognized that Spain, Britain, and France had all used government-operated trading posts to gain Native support, and initially federal officials chose to emulate that model. In practice, however, the American factory system was structured in a complicated way and very inefficiently administered. The limitations posed by unreliable

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communication networks did not help either. Andrew C. Isenberg has described the factory system as “a federal quasi-monopoly. . . . [that] provided both for the licensing of private traders and the establishment of government trading posts in the Indian borderlands.” But despite its inefficiencies, Sibley regularly used the tools provided by the factory system to further U.S. government policies in the southwest.

Sibley used the factory system the way that it was supposed to be used, and in doing so, he was sometimes able to represent the U.S. government as the ally that Native groups had come to expect in their dealings with other European powers. Sibley still believed in ultimate U.S. sovereignty over the trans-Mississippi West, but he, more so than other U.S. Indian agents, he sometimes recognized the limits of that sovereignty and sought practical ways to develop relationships with Native groups that might lead to the outcomes that the federal government desired, like the removal of the southeastern tribes. One of the ways Sibley attempted to build relationships with Native groups was through some of the many American traders operating out of the Natchitoches region. He used those traders and their connections to further the policy goals of the U.S. government. Despite the fact that American trade with the tribes in the Spanish province of Texas remained illegal, Spain lacked the resources to actually prevent it, and thus American traders continued to find themselves very well-received, especially at the Wichita villages on the Red River, a fact Sibley exploited to the advantage of the federal government.

Soon after Sibley was appointed as the agent for southwestern Louisiana Territory in December 1804, a Caddo messenger arrived in Natchitoches with a request that traders be sent to the “Panis Pique” (i.e. Wichita) villages on the Red River. Sibley quickly acted upon the request,

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recognizing that those villages were “the most important native marketplace on the Southern Plains.” Sibley encouraged American traders to go there, sending messages and presents with them. Later, in March 1805, Sibley granted local trader John House a license to trade with the Indians of the Southwest. More importantly, Sibley loaded House down with presents purchased using federal funds, telling House to distribute the presents to the Wichitas and other Indian groups who might also be at the Red River villages. Sibley hoped these tokens would further increase the Indians’ feelings of friendship toward the United States. Sibley’s tactic must have helped smooth the way for House, because he and the rest of his party stayed at the Red River villages for the entire summer of 1805. Federal officials soon granted Sibley another $5000 worth of merchandise to distribute to local Native groups. Such a vast amount of presents had not been seen in the region since the days of French friendship, which the Wichitas remembered with fondness. Thrilled with the situation, a delegation of Taovayas, Tawakonis, and Guichitas traveled to Natchitoches in June 1805 to meet with Sibley.

Because of the Americans’ generosity and the regular appearance of traders coming up the Red River, the majority of the Native groups in the region had stopped trading with the Spanish by the spring of 1806. This shift caused some friction among the Wichita bands, who, although never fully unified political entities, often acted collectively. Tawakoni chief Daguarisca was the most vocal opponent to the development of exclusive trade with the Americans, preferring to keep the door open to cooperation and trade with the Spanish as well.

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The Taovayas, who were led by the powerful and charismatic chief Awahakei, were most in favor of turning toward the Americans. The shift away from Spain was so complete for the Taovayas that their warriors frequently raided Spanish settlements during this period.\(^7\)

Enticed by Sibley’s and others’ reports about the southwest, Jefferson authorized an exploratory mission to travel up the Red River in 1806, intending it to be the southwestern companion to Lewis and Clark’s successful northwestern mission. Sibley eagerly helped organize the mission, hoping greater knowledge about the terrain would help the U.S. prove its claims about the actual boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase. On June 2 the expedition, which was led by Thomas Freeman and Peter Custis, departed from Natchitoches and headed up the Red River. However, the increasingly jealous Spanish administrators in Texas had gotten wind of the expedition. They feared that this seemingly innocent exploratory mission would lead to the further U.S. influence over the Indian tribes on their northern border. A large Spanish military force intercepted the party not far up the Red River on July 20, forcing them to turn back to Natchitoches.\(^8\)

After the Freeman and Custis incident, Spain and the United States made an agreement that essentially allowed them both to ignore the issue of the border. Neither side wished to actually go to war over the issue, and so they simply agreed that the boundary was in dispute and that it would be easier to settle the matter at a later date. In the meantime, the region between

\(^7\) In a letter to Henry Dearborn, Sibley described the Wichita as “at war with the Spaniards, but friendly to those French & American hunters who have lately been among them.” See Sibley to Dearborn, April 5, 1805 in *The New American State Papers. Explorations and Surveys. Volume 1*, (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1972), p. 44. The great extent and profitability of these new American trade connections explains why the Taovayas seem to have so quickly abandoned the Spanish, with whom they had tried for decades to establish a lasting alliance.

Natchitoches and the Sabine River would become a “neutral ground” between the two polities. It was such a polite way to achieve a neutral zone, especially when compared to the process it took to do the same between the Osage and Comanche empires just a few decades before. The boundary issue would not be completely resolved until after the Mexican Revolution, but the creation of the “neutral ground” was important because it made the southwestern borderlands even more fluid, allowing Native and white migrants to hunt, settle, and travel through the region with ease. American trading expeditions continued to go up the Red River: between 1803 and about 1812, there was almost always an American trading party at the Wichita villages. Spain no longer posed a significant threat to American trading efforts along the Red River, but the Osages continued to make raids in the region. Sibley eventually wrote “These Ozages are regarded by all white & Red people in this quarter as a Common peste to mankind.”

In one of Sibley’s earliest reports to Henry Dearborn, he described evidence of Osage attacks on almost all the tribes who lived on or near the Red River. For example, Sibley noted that within the previous five years, the Caddos had moved far to the southeast, down the Red River to within 120 miles of Natchitoches. Previously, they had lived twice as far up the Red River, but living there put them in a position very vulnerable to Osage raids. Because they had also recently suffered devastating outbreaks of smallpox and measles, the Caddos’ dwindling population left them in no position to resist Osage raids. They had horses and Sibley wrote that “most of them have guns, and some of them have rifles,” but even with those weapons they

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9 Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire*, p. 146.

could not fight back against the Osages’ onslaught. The Caddos were thus stuck in a vicious cycle: they needed access to coveted goods, like guns and rifles, to defend themselves from Osage raids; yet those very goods made them even more obvious targets for Osage raids. They made the bold decision to move 150 miles southeast, closer to the American populations that exposed them to disease, desperate to escape the powerful Osages.

Increased economic activity at the Red River villages had made the Wichitas even more tempting targets for Osage raiders. Sibley noted to Dearborn and Jefferson that the Wichitas were almost always at war with the Osages. Not wishing to paint the very important Wichitas as too warlike, Sibley was careful to point out that they were “friendly to those French and American hunters who have lately been among them.” Sibley was told by that the Wichitas had “but few guns, and very little ammunition.” This might have been true, since the Wichita were obliged to trade much of what they got from American traders to the Comanches, but it was also in the Wichitas’ best interest to downplay the number of guns that they had to encourage more traders to come amongst them (and perhaps so the Comanches would not think that the Wichita were holding back supplies). Sibley also noted that he had been told that “what [guns and ammunition] they have they keep for war, and hunt with the bow.” They needed guns for war to compete with the well-armed Osages. He summed up the situation in the Red River valley thus: “all [the] other Indians that we have any knowledge of, are at war with the Osages.” It was a situation that would

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11 Sibley to Henry Dearborn, April 5, 1805, New American State Papers, p. 42.
not change for many decades and influenced U.S. officials’ policies toward the Osages. The Osages’ actions in the southwest are also important because they demonstrate that even as they faced competition from other Native groups from the east and the encroachment of the white population on their borders, they still remained a formidable force with which U.S. agents in the West had to contend. Osage raids kept other Native people, and sometimes American traders, out of the region that would soon be designated as “Indian Territory.” From the outside perspective of U.S. officials, therefore, this region appeared to be available space, which would help them complete Indian removal. Thus the actions that federal government officials took as they tried to begin implementing Indian removal policies in the West were always circumscribed by the realities of Native power and control in the region, even if they did not always realize it.

When American traders John S. Lewis and Jeremiah Downs returned to Natchitoches in June 1807 from a winter-long trade visit to the Red River villages, Sibley was further encouraged that his strategy to win the friendship of the southwestern nations was succeeding. Lewis and Downs came “Accompanied by a Chief & Eight Men of the [Wichita] Nation.” The chief was Awahakei, the powerful Taovaya leader. Four other Americans, Alexander, Litton, Lusk, and Lucas, remained in the Red River villages. Lewis impressed Sibley with stories about being invited by a Comanche chief who had been at the Wichita villages to visit his camp on the plains.

_12 ibid. Sibley’s other letters are filled with references to problems caused by the Osages on and south of the Red River. In April 1807, he learned that recently “a party of about 25 Ozages crossed Red River above the Caddo Nation & stole from the Caddos 72 Horses.” Local Indian groups did not simply allow the Osages to steal without retaliation, however. Sibley noted, “Eight or nine Chochattas (or Creeks) & Alibamas were out a hunting, fell in with the Same party of Ozages, Attacked them in the night, killed five of them, Routed the whole party, & Retook about 40 of the Horses they had Stolen from the Caddos.” Sibley to Dearborn, April 3, 1807, in Grant, ed., “Doctor John Sibley,” _Southwestern Historical Quarterly_ 45 (January 1942), pp. 297-98. A year and a half later, little had changed: “In our Indian affairs I know of Nothing Else Amiss except the Panis & Caddos Complain very much of repeated depredations being Committed upon them by the Osages.” Sibley to Dearborn, September 7, 1808 in Grant, ed., _Southwestern Historical Quarterly_ (January 1943) p. 275._
Lewis likely would not have been able to go had he not specifically been invited by the Comanche chief, because the Wichitas guarded their access to American traders jealously. Lewis saw more than two thousand horses and mules at the Comanche camp, which he described as “remarkable fine Animals.” He bought a few horses from the Comanches, but could not buy more because he had already traded the majority of his goods to the Wichitas. Much to Sibley’s delight, the Comanche chief had told Lewis that he had heard about the American chief in Natchitoches, meaning Sibley, and intended to visit there soon.\textsuperscript{13}

Awahakei had obviously realized the diplomatic and economic importance of this meeting between Lewis and the Comanche chief. It was a potentially dangerous moment for the Wichitas and the health of their trading relationship and military alliance with the Comanches. Awahakei probably feared a repeat of the events of the 1740s and 1750s, when direct contact between the Comanches and French traders had destroyed the Wichitas’ position as middlemen. The Comanches were pleased with the regular American trade that they could get at the Red River villages, but they believed that the Wichitas were being too stingy, and were not trading as many goods as the Comanches wanted and charging prices that were too high. It is thus unsurprising that Awahakei himself, along with eight other important Wichita leaders, accompanied Lewis back to Natchitoches to meet Sibley, determined to make sure their people remained politically and economically relevant within the Comanche empire. These were efforts that the Wichitas would repeat in the 1830s.

Based on what Sibley wrote about his talk with Awahakei, it seems that the chief chose to address the subject indirectly, a tactic typical of Wichita diplomacy. Awahakei spoke mostly

\textsuperscript{13} Sibley to Dearborn, June 25, 1807, in Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll. #1.
about all the trade goods and presents that his people had recently been getting from the Spanish governor at San Antonio: “a Great Many Presents in Arms, Ammunition, Horses, Mules, Saddles, Bridles, Blankets, etc.” The Taovaya chief also mentioned that although the Spanish commander had given him flags to fly at his village, he had refused to put them up with, or in place of, the American flags that were already there. He mentioned these specific incidents for two reasons. First, he wanted to emphasize his own people’s importance—receiving a large amount of presents indicated the esteem in which his people were held by the giver, the Spanish government. Awahakei knew that Spain and the United States were rivals, which also explains the second reason for his comments: he wanted to make Sibley jealous. He hoped that Sibley would thus also recognize the Wichitas’ importance and try to out-do the Spanish in gift-giving, a gesture that Sibley was more than willing to attempt.

In August 1807, more Wichita and Caddo chiefs arrived in Natchitoches, but this time they also came with eighty Comanches, an unprecedented event, since Comanche leaders usually waited for people to come to them. From the Comanches’ perspective, the arrival of regular American traders up the Red River provided an opportunity to build real economic relationships that could serve both parties. To the Comanches, the Americans were only a small group of people, not unlike the French who had arrived centuries before. And they brought useful items. Nothing about the Americans’ presence in the West at this time would have indicated to the

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15 John Sibley to Henry Dearborn, June 25, 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1. Sibley told another version of the same story in another letter to Dearborn dated July 3, 1807. See Garrett, ed., “Dr. John Sibley and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier,” *SW. Hist. Quar.* Volume 45 (April 1942), p. 380. In the second letter about Awahakei’s visit, the population of the Comanche camp that John Lewis visited increased to “not less than three thousand Souls” and the number of horses and mules increased from two thousand to “not less than 5000.”
Comanches anything about the federal government’s ambitions about future uses of the region. The Wichita and Caddo leaders could only hope that Sibley would not send all of the American traders directly to the Comanches. But Sibley, too impressed with the sense of his own importance that the arrival of the Comanche delegation gave him, did not record (or did not pick up on) any discord among the party. Yet tensions surely existed, especially since even the reluctant Tawakoni chief Daguarisca felt compelled by the importance of the Comanches’ visit to accompany the group to Natchitoches.16

Following the successful meetings at Natchitoches, Awahakei invited more traders to the villages in the spring of 1808, trying to entice the Americans to continue to trade with his people by promising “that in the Summer there would be assembled . . . a very large Number of friendly Indians of the Nations in his Neighbourhood, for the purpose of holding a trading fare.”17 Sibley responded by outfitting a local Natchitoches trader, Anthony Glass, with presents and other trade goods. Because Glass was heading west in both a personal and official capacity, Sibley asked Glass to record a journal chronicling his interactions with the Wichitas and Comanches.18

16 Pekka Hamalainen has attributed the eastern Comanches’ efforts to overcome their frustration with Wichita trading practices through direct diplomatic meetings with the Americans as a sign of their fear of the Osages. He writes that at the beginning of the nineteenth century “the Osages had embarked on yet another expansionist round” (p. 147). More Osages in one of their prime buffalo hunting grounds would certainly have bothered the Comanches as a violation of the decades-old neutral ground. In that sense, Hamalainen’s statement might be true—the Comanches wanted to have the Wichita as allies against the Osage, but they were probably more interested in the Wichita keeping their villages on the Red River to serve as convenient targets for Osage raids.


18 The family history of Glass is itself illustrative of how common it was for Americans to move into the Louisiana Territory prior to its acquisition by the United States. Traditions state that the Glass family may have been Loyalists during the American Revolution, thus prompting their movement to Louisiana in the early 1790s. Dan Flores speculates that Anthony Glass and his brother Andrew probably knew personally, or at least knew about, Philip Nolan and his very profitable trading ventures in the West, spurring them to get into the trading business themselves. He was also acquainted with John House, Jeremiah Downs, and others who also traded in the West. See Dan Flores, ed., Journal of an Indian Trader, pp. 26-27.
Louisiana governor W. C. C. Claiborne and other U.S. officials were concerned about the legality of the Glass expedition. Rumors about silver mines in the Wichita Mountains (which were near the Red River villages) were rampant, and it was reported that developing those mines was the real reason for Glass’s trip up the Red River. Claiborne and others feared attempts by Americans to access those supposed mines would cause trouble with Spain, but Claiborne also had a general distrust of John Sibley and his true motives. Claiborne especially was not sure to what degree the affairs of private individuals like Glass should be intertwined with government policies and objectives. Sibley clearly had few qualms about mixing the two: he provided Glass with $2,000 worth of government merchandise, which was probably about one fourth of the total value of the merchandise taken by Glass on the trip. The Glass expedition is the best example of Sibley’s efforts to create friendships and extend U.S. sovereignty in the southwest through trade.

However, the journal recorded by Glass ultimately reveals how little control the U.S. had over the situation in the West, and just how powerful the Comanches remained, both economically and politically. The existence of the journal itself is also another indication that more accurate information about the West was often available to federal officials, but it was rarely used to any effect.

About five weeks after leaving Natchitoches, the Glass party arrived within five miles of the Wichita villages. Camping at a distance, they sent a messenger into the villages to announce their arrival. They were formally greeted the following morning by fifty men, including

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19 Sibley, like many Indian agents who would come after him, was deeply involved in all sorts of speculative economic ventures on the frontier. He had purchased land in the region near his agency and developed a salt works, which was in fact that location where the Glass party eventually departed from.

20 Flores, ed., *Journal of an Indian Trader*, pp. 43-45. The number of buffalo Glass reported only continued to increase as his party moved further west. He was approaching the southern end of one of the finest buffalo ranges on the plains.
Awahakei, all on horseback, and taken to a council of all the prominent men and women of the village. In his speech to the council, Glass first stated that their “Great Father,” the president of the United States, wished them to stay out of the dispute between the U.S. and Spain, perhaps reflecting Sibley’s instructions not to do or say anything that would get back to the Spanish and lead them to believe that the expedition was about anything other than trade. Glass emphasized that he was there to trade with the Comanches and the Wichitas, stating he wanted to see “your brothers - the Hietans, [and trade] for Horses if you will trade with us on fair and Equal terms, you will in future be supplied with goods brought into your towns…” Thus Glass tried to reassure the Wichita that he would continue to trade with both groups.

After initial difficulties setting the prices for horses and goods, Glass made a series of trades with members from all three villages, buying dozens of horses. He quickly discovered, however, that keeping track of his purchases would be difficult. Just over a week into the trading, the men out guarding Glass’s growing horse herd reported that about a dozen Osages had stolen twenty-nine of the recently acquired animals. The guards attempted to pursue the Osages for five or six miles, but quickly lost the trail. Concerned about additional raids, Glass moved his entire herd over to the south side of the Red River. He noted that the Wichitas put their own horses in

21 Glass journal, p. 47. Glass estimated that the total population of the three villages was about 2,000, on par with estimates from other sources. However, he noted that there was a very imbalanced sex ratio among the Wichita. Out of those 2,000 people, he considered only about 300 to be “warriors,” or young and middle-aged men. The long history of warfare with the Osage was probably one of the main reasons for this imbalance. See Glass journal, p. 55.

22 But he discovered that Americans were not the only source of trade goods to be found at the Red River villages. As Hamalainen and others have noted, an important north to south trade had also begun to develop within Comancheria. Glass reported evidence of that network, stating some Skidi Pawnees had recently brought “goods from English traders from the Lakes of Canada” to the villages. Perhaps there were the Panismahas? The precise identity of the Pawnee group that had sustained contact with the Wichita villages is uncertain. F. Todd Smith has noted that a Pawnee band actually moved from the Platte River region to the Red River to be closer to their Wichita allies. See Hamalainen’s discussion of who the thinks the Panismahas were, Comanche Empire, p. 151. Flores, ed., Journal of an Indian Trader, p. 56.
pens next to their homes every single night, but “not withstanding all their precautions the Osages frequently steal away their Horses in the night.” Glass was not impressed with the Wichitas’ ability to defend against the Osage raids. After an early August raid in which thirteen horses were easily snatched by the Osages, Glass and some of his men joined the Wichita men who were trying to recover the animals. It turned out to be a fruitless six hour trip. Glass reported that “not more than thirty of the Party that went out had guns the rest had Bows and Arrows.” However, the Wichitas were not entirely unsuccessful in their counter-raids, because Glass also saw Osage prisoners among the Wichitas “whom they Compell to labour like slaves.”

To Glass’s relief, the Comanches were also in the region and prepared to trade. In late August, when a report reached the villages that a party of Comanches were nearby, some of Glass’s group went out to trade with them, returning a few days later “with Eleven good Horses...” The Comanches followed the Americans back to the villages, arriving a few days later “to buy corn of the [Wichitas].” At the beginning of September, Glass’s party separated. Six members, probably including the experienced Comanche trader William C. Alexander, set off with a portion of their trade goods and a Wichita chief and his son to go find the “Lower Hietans,” who were probably the Penateka Comanches. Another group took the horse herd thirty miles further south, to a well-known horse pasturage by the Trinity River. Glass, along with two men named McCall and Lucas, remained at the villages.

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23 Flores, ed., *Journal of an Indian Trader*, p. 52. The Wichitas appeared to Glass to be very intimidated by the Osages, who were sometimes so bold as to make raids at the villages during the day. He wrote of one incident, noting that the Osages “hoisted two flags between the Villages in the Day about 12 O Clock one Red and the other White and drove off about five hundred horses. [T]hey appeared so strong that the [Wichitas] did not think proper to sally out and attack them.”
Nearly three weeks later, Alexander’s group returned frustrated, telling Glass that they “suspected that the Indian guide they had with them had refused to guide them to the Hietan Camp.” This is unsurprising, revealing that despite Glass’s promises, the Wichitas still feared being undercut by the development of direct trade between the Americans and the Comanches. At the beginning of October, Glass’s party again set off in search of Comanche camps for trade, this time at a place arranged specifically by Awahakei for Glass and his men. Awahakei saw that to maintain American goodwill, it was going to be necessary to allow at least some direct trade between the Comanches and the Americans. However, the Wichitas were not united in this position. A Wichita chief on the south side of the Red River tried to stop Glass from moving his trade goods across the river and demanded an entire keg of Glass’s gunpowder in compensation. The two men eventually compromised, and Glass paid the Wichita man with only some of the gunpowder.

About fifty miles southwest of the Red River villages, Glass found the camp of Comanches collected by Awahakei. The camp was constantly moving, not only to hunt for the 1,000 people who were with the whole group, but also to provide enough grass for the mules and horses that Glass estimated to number at least 3,000. This group of Comanches were unwilling to trade at the prices Glass and his party were offering, so some of the experienced traders in the

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25 Some of the men decided to go ahead and return to Natchitoches with the horses that they had already been able to purchase, probably hoping that no more would be stolen by the Osages along the way, and fearful that taking them out onto the Plains might also lead to further losses. Sibley reported the return of these men, seemingly satisfied with the developments that had transpired thus far.
group who had previously traded with a different Comanche band “went in search of a larger horde of Hietans of whom they expected to Purchase what Horses and Mules they wanted.”

On October 28th, near the Colorado River, Glass’s party met up with another large Comanche band, possibly Yamparikas. Among this group of Comanches were some who had recently visited Natchitoches and “they profess[ed] great friendship for the American or Anglos as they call us.” These friendly Comanches were “highly pleased with the treatment they received from Doctor Sibley . . . and say they intend to repeat their visit.” Additionally, they were “very desirous of trading with us but say Nackitosh [Natchitoches] is too far off.” Glass stayed with this Comanche band for months, long enough for word of his presence to spread to other Comanche bands, which he described as “some of the upper hordes.” The Comanches, Wichitas, and Americans finally parted ways in February 1809. Stopping at the Red River villages on their way back east, the Americans learned that the Osages had recently attacked, killing two men and stealing many horses. In response, a combined Comanche and Wichita force launched “an ineffectual attack upon the Osages” who lived on the Arkansas River that summer.

Sibley reported that Glass saw a party of about one thousand Comanche and Wichita warriors preparing to go on a war expedition “[a]gainst the Ozages on the River Arkensa, with a determination to terminate that Band of Robbers; who are Constantly stealing their Horses...” Glass himself had lost at least thirty-six horses to Osage raids while he had been trading among the Wichitas and

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26 Flores, ed., *Journal of an Indian Trader*, p. 70. Glass’s tone seems nervous when he mentions this. But he was also surprised that after a significant portion of his party left him among Comanches who seemed unwilling to trade, the Comanches just left him alone. He was keenly aware of his isolation and thought that the Comanches might take advantage of it, but to his surprise, they did not.


28 F. Todd Smith, *The Wichita Indians*
Comanches and he estimated that “during the last year... they [the Osages] Stole from the Panis Near One Thousand head.”

Later that year, some former members of Glass’s trading party returned to the Red River villages to buy more horses. As those men were leaving, Sibley reported to officials in Washington that he had taken over the duties at the U.S. factory in Natchitoches after the death of the previous man in charge. This was necessary to provide trading opportunities “to the Indians who are Coming in in Considerable numbers at this Season of the year to trade.” And come they certainly did: Sibley reported that the factory had “about ten Thousand Deer & Bear Skins On hand” that had been brought in by Indians. Reports from Spanish officials indicated that around 1810, some American traders had established a camp on the Colorado River, where they traded extensively with the Comanche and other Plains tribes.29

Anthony Glass’s trip was one of the most important and revealing American trading expeditions on the Red River in the early nineteenth century. Glass’s journey showed how willing the Comanches were to be friends with the Americans and the important economic opportunities on the plains that Americans could benefit from. The Comanches were not inherently hostile toward Americans, as some federal officials would later believe. Instead, they saw the Americans as potentially useful allies who were not necessarily any different from the other Native groups that they engaged in trade with. Sibley’s involvement in Glass’s and other trading expeditions is also revealing of his efforts to make allies of western Native groups as he tried to pull their allegiances away from Spain and assert U.S. sovereignty over Louisiana.

Sibley’s efforts were certainly unique for the old Southwest. After his dismissal in January 1815, likely for petty political reasons, Sibley was briefly replaced by Thomas Gales, who seemed to be quickly learning about the political and economic dynamics of the region. The Wichitas and Comanches also quickly became aware of the change in U.S. leadership in the region, and sent word to Natchitoches in August 1815 that they were coming east again to meet with Gales. However, Gales died after only a few months on the job. Gales was replaced by John Jamison, who F. Todd Smith has described as being “far less concerned with cultivating friendship with the Wichitas than his predecessor.” Personality and personal interests mattered a great deal when it came to the administration of Indian affairs in the West. Although each agent received the same basic job instructions, they all seem to have interpreted their roles in different ways. Osage raids forced the Wichitas to move their Red River villages, but both they and the Comanches continued to try to cultivate a relationship with the U.S. government through Natchitoches. Jamison recognized the Comanches eagerness, reporting that because so many Comanches had been coming in to trade, he would probably need an increase in his budget for presents from $1400 to $2000 for the 1817 fiscal year. However, unlike Sibley, Jamison merely reacted to Native efforts at trade and friendship, rather than seeking to create those opportunities himself.

Although William Clark served in some capacity for the U.S. government regarding Indian affairs for much longer than Sibley, he had a much different approach. He encountered

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30 Gales to Secretary of War, February 1, 1815, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1.

some of the same Native groups that Sibley did, but it is unclear if the information reported by both men to officials in Washington was ever relayed to each of them. Part of the reason for Clark’s different approach was the very different context that existed in the central portion of the Louisiana Purchase where he was in charge. The influx of white and Native migrants, although occurring at a great rate in the southwest, was even more pronounced near St. Louis, creating a different situation to which U.S. officials had to respond. Most significantly, the greater flow of people into and through the region made it more necessary for the federal government to try acting quickly to implement policies that would allow for removal to be implemented the way that they wanted. Thus William Clark was on the front lines of the Jefferson administration’s attempts to begin obtaining land cessions from western Native groups to make room for groups removing from the East.

Despite having limited information about the Indian nations of the Louisiana Territory, and knowing that eastern nations were rapidly migrating there, Jefferson and members of his cabinet began discussing the possibility of the removal of eastern Native nations very soon after the Louisiana Purchase. Letters were regularly exchanged between eastern bureaucrats and federal officials who were actually in the West about what conditions would be necessary for the implementation of removal. For example, Louisiana governor James Wilkinson wrote to Henry Dearborn in 1805: “I have said before, I believe, and I beg to repeat, that an indispensable prelimentary to the transfer of the Southern Nations, to the West of the Mississippi is a solid peace between those nations [the Cherokee and Quapaw] and the Osages particularly.”

Wilkinson was describing one of the main problems that U.S. officials confronted over the next

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thirty years: trying to figure out how to ensure that peaceful relations existed between the tribes already in the West, and how to get those tribes to give up land and get along with all the other Indians that the federal government knew were removing and wanted to remove to the West. People like Wilkinson realized that removal would be even more difficult to implement without the cooperation of western Indian nations, but although he and others recognized this as a potential problem, they often lacked the ability to do anything practical about it.

Initially, the Osages had hoped to develop a relationship with the United States that was like the one Sibley was developing with the Wichitas and Comanches. The French and Spanish governments had recognized the Osages’ power and importance in the Mississippi region, and had thus acted accordingly, treating the Osages with diplomatic respect and sending the traders that the Osages desired. Soon after federal officials arrived in Louisiana, they arranged for a delegation of Osages to go to Washington, D.C. The Osages took this attention by United States officials as a recognition of their power and importance, and they expected to be treated in much the same way in the future.33 In some of Henry Dearborn’s initial instructions to Pierre Chouteau, who had recently been appointed as an agent for the U.S. government to the western Indians, he instructed Chouteau to “be particularly attentive to our friends the Osage nation.”34

Later, the Osages hoped to continue demonstrating their importance to U.S. officials by making sure they knew that the Spanish were courting them for a new alliance. William Clark reported to Henry Dearborn in 1807 that the Osages had told him of an important meeting that the Spanish were planning to have with the “Panias” in the west. The Osages had been invited


34 Secretary of War to Pierre Chouteau, July 17, 1804, Territorial Papers, Vol. XIII, p. 31-32.
too, and they meant to go and see what terms the Spanish might offer them. It it unclear if the story the Osages told Clark was actually true. Most likely it was not. Considering their problems maintaining an alliance with the Comanches and Wichitas, it is unlikely that the Spanish government would have been able to push north to make an alliance with the Pawnees or the Osages. The “Paniás” may also have been the Wichitas, which would make more sense, but there is no evidence that the Spanish tried to broker peace between the Wichitas and Osages at this time. More likely, the Osages were just trying to magnify their own position to achieve the relationship with, and concessions from, the United States that they wanted.35

It was becoming increasingly difficult for the Osages to continue shaping their relationship with the U.S. however, not only because of the increase in both white and Native settlers on their borders, and the changes those arrivals wrought to U.S. policies in the west, but also because of the deep factionalism within the tribe that increased as problems mounted on every side.36 Numerous new villages and bands had begun to develop by the late eighteenth century, a trend that only accelerated during the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Many Osage men who moved away to start new villages “were ambitious ones who often did not have place in the older social system” where political power was based on lineage. Osage men “created new clans, positions, ceremonial prerogatives, and ritual activities to meet the growing demands for power.”37 This was a major problem from the perspective of federal officials, who


36 See Meriwether Lewis to Henry Dearborn, July 1, 1808, Territorial Papers, Vol. XIV, p. 197, for a description of some of the divisions that were developing in the Osage Nation, especially among the Great Osages, who had split over the leadership of White Hair. The Little Osages, according to Lewis, were firm in their loyalty to the United States.

wanted to consolidate the Osages and make sure that they acted politically as a single people with one leader. The U.S. government found it much easier to deal with Indian tribes who recognized a single leader because it was too complicated and expensive to deal with different bands of the same tribe. Just as important was the belief that the more consolidated the Osages were, the less land they were likely to claim.

In marked contrast to the tactics used by Sibley, Meriwether Lewis, who had been appointed the governor of Louisiana Territory in March 1807, and William Clark, who was appointed as the Indian agent around the same time, tried to use the conflicts developing between the Osages and the emigrating tribes to the advantage of the United States and its ultimate removal goals. Officials who went west immediately after the Louisiana Purchase realized that they would have to at least cooperate with the Osages, but from St. Louis, the Osage appeared much weaker than they did further south in Natchitoches, where they were known mostly for their brutal raids. From St. Louis, their political factionalism was much more apparent, a situation that Lewis and Clark realized they might be able to use to get land cessions for the rapidly increasing number of white and Native migrants in the region. It quickly became a priority for the United States to make peace treaties with the Osages that also contained land cessions.38

Late in the summer of 1808, William Clark set out west from St. Louis, looking for a place to establish a new U.S. military fort on the frontier and to get the Osages to sign a land cession treaty. This treaty is massively revealing of the federal government’s early planning for the removal of the eastern tribes to the west side of the Mississippi. The treaty is known to

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historians by several names, usually the Treaty of Fort Osage or the Treaty of Fire Prairie. Clark, Lewis, and other U.S. officials had quickly realized that the Osages claimed so much land in the West that it would be difficult for the tribes that were already removing, and those that wanted to remove, to find enough space to do so. A land cession from the Osages would free up a significant amount of territory and also might allow the government to begin planning settlement locations for removing tribes.

The Osages were willing to meet with U.S. representatives to discuss a treaty for completely different reasons. Making a land cession to the United States was probably the farthest thing from the mind of prominent Osage leader Pawhuska as he made plans to meet Clark. A few months before, Osage leaders had personally sought a meeting with Lewis to hopefully smooth over problems that had arisen from attacks by Osage warriors on some of the American settlements that were rapidly expanding west of St. Louis. As Kathleen DuVal has explained, the Osages expected that U.S. officials would simply accept Osage leaders’ explanations that they had no control over their warriors, admonish them to do better, and then just smooth over the situation with gifts when conflicts arose between the Osages and European settlers or traders. Spanish and French officials had been willing to do so because they wanted Osage trade and cooperation, not land. Thus when Lewis had suggested to the Osage chiefs that they meet with William Clark in a few months to completely settle the situation, everything seemed to be going as expected.39

39 DuVal, The Native Ground, pp. 201-03. DuVal’s book emphasizes the Osages’ misunderstanding about U.S. intentions as the reason that the treaty of 1808 was signed. She wrote “Pawhuska expected Clark to accept the chiefs’ explanations, vacuously warn them against future transgressions, and send them home laden with presents” (p. 202) and “Eager to mend the rift and acquire the proffered benefits, the chiefs agreed to the treaty, which seemed consistent with past Osage policy” (p. 202). These are necessary elements of explaining the treaty, but it ignores the larger context of why the United State was so interested in obtaining a land cession from a tribe that already lived west of the Mississippi River.
However, both Lewis and Clark had completely different expectations of what was going to happen at the treaty meeting. Lewis took the Osage chiefs’ statement that they could not govern their people quite literally, reading it as an invitation for the United States to assert actual control over the Osage people. The text of the treaty that Clark brought with him to western Missouri indicates that getting a land cession from the Osages was paramount in both men’s minds as the best way to actually prevent future conflicts between the Osages and expanding white and Native settlements west of St. Louis. Both men hoped for a large land cession, but what they got may even have surpassed their own expectations. Once the treaty was actually signed, they believed they had acquired more than 50,000 square miles of territory—almost the entire present-day state of Missouri. Lewis was so excited that he had finally met with an Osage delegation that was willing to meet and discuss a land cession, that he reported to Henry Dearborn that it was time to “leave the malecontents” in the Osage nation who had not agreed to meet “to their fate.” Lewis told local eastern migrant groups that certain groups of Osages were “no longer under the protection of the government of the U’Sates,” and therefore they “were at liberty to wage war against them if they thought proper, under this ristriction only, that they should attack in a body sufficiently large to cut them off completely or drive them from their country.”

On September 5, 1808 William Clark reached the location he had chosen for the site of the new U.S. fort, not coincidentally named Fort Clark, on the north side of the Missouri River,

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40 In *The Imperial Osage*, Gilbert C. Din and Abraham P. Nasatir describe U.S. interest in a treaty with the Osages as only related to the growing U.S. population in the region. This was undoubtedly one of the reasons, since the white population was in the process of growing from only 10,000 in 1804, to over 20,000 in the 1810 census. p. 375.

near the present-day border of Missouri and Kansas. On his arrival, Clark sent messengers to the Osages telling them that he had chosen a building site and expected them to assemble soon to begin the treaty negotiations that they had promised to attend. In marked contrast to Sibley’s style of generously sending traders with greetings and goods to almost all the Native people he encountered, even though he thought they were “savages,” Clark used the possibility of trade (or the lack thereof) as a threat. After sending messengers to the Osages, Clark also “Sent to [the Kansas] Nation, informing them not to come near untill they shew evidences of doing better than they had done,” apparently referencing reports that the Kansas Nation had recently stolen from nearby American traders and settlers. Clark then went on to say that if the Kansas did not do better “we should punish them &c [and] that they Should have no traders this year.” Clark made these threats despite the fact that one of the purposes of constructing a fort on the western Missouri River was so that the U.S. government could open a factory to trade with the Indians. Clark was much less subtle than Sibley, who at the same time was instead using trade as a tool to assert U.S. sovereignty.

An Osage delegation arrived at the fort’s construction site a few days later, on September 12. Clark then commenced trying to convince the Osages of the own insignificance, especially in relation to the United States and its plans for removal of the eastern Indians. Clark wrote “I had a Councel with all the Indians pres[en]t, informed them what was about to be done by the government of U S and the parts I had acted and intended to act, their Situation with the U S and the different Indian tribes.” He also “informed them they had been in frequent habits of committing Theft Murder and Robory on the Citizens of the U. S in this Territory, and to

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effectually put a Stop to all such like acts in future an under Standing must take place before I leave them which will be in 3 days.” To the Osages, this probably seemed like the reprimand part of the diplomatic process that they were used to going through with French and Spanish government representatives.

However, Clark quickly moved on to discuss his land cession proposal, making sure to frame the idea in terms that the Osages would think was ultimately favorable to their own interests. Knowing that the Osages were concerned about the encroachment of white and Native hunters on their territory, Clark emphasized that he would “propose a line to be run between the U S & the Osage hunting lands,” which would supposedly prevent unwanted people from hunting on certain Osage lands. However, in exchange for this and for the federal government agreeing to “pay thir own Citizens for Such property” that the “bad men” among the Osages “had Stolen” from Americans, the Osages would have to agree that “all the land” south of the proposed boundary line would “be given up by the Osages to the U.S. for ever.” All of this was also contingent on the Osages “conduct[ing] themselves properly in future.”

In his journal, Clark made it sound as though the Osages fully understood what they were agreeing to, and that they were ready to sign the treaty right away. For example, Clark wrote, “The Great Chiefs Spoke and assented to what I had proposed to them, telling me they would do it with pleasure, &c and informing me that I was doing them a great Service, and they would be ready to Sign tomorrow.” The next day, the treaty was signed. Clark believed that he had secured “near Thirty Milion of acres of excellent country” from the Osages for the United States. This was a major coup, especially because it secured to the United States the title to all “the [white]

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43 ibid, pp. 38-39.
Settlements below the Missouri” that had already sprung up. However, Clark should have realized that there was confusion among the Osages about what they actually agreed to sign. He wrote that some objections were made to some of the proposed lines, but his solution probably added to the confusion, as he responded to Osage questions by saying that he would draw “a temporary line” where the Osages wanted “and [would] suffer no White Man to hunt west of the line with[out] permission from the President of the U.S. and also to prevent the like Missunderstanding which had taken place between the White hunters & the Osage.”

Clark wanted to cover all his bases, writing that he was personally convinced of the Osages’ understanding of what had taken place: “The Chiefs and Warriors express great Satisfaction at the Treaty as [read] and interpreted twice to them and with great apparent pleasure Signed the Treaty.” Clark claimed to have convinced the Osage chiefs that “it was better that they should be on the lands of the U.S. where they Could Hunt without the fear of other Indians attacking them for their Country, than being in continual dread of all the eastern Tribes.” With this remark, Clark was referring to the provision of the treaty that stated the Osages would live on a particular portion of their lands, or what was essentially a reservation. Clark also seemed to think that this agreement by the Osages to cede most of their lands and live at a place designated by the U.S. was a tacit admission by the Osages that those reservations lands would be “of the U.S.” Because the federal government had guaranteed the possession of those lands to the Osages, it would only make sense from Clark’s perspective that the U.S. then exercised ultimate sovereignty over those lands.44

44 ibid.
In the text of the treaty, Clark claimed that the land cession and the construction of the fort on the Missouri were about the protection of the Osages “from the insults and injuries of other tribes of Indians, situated near the settlements of the white people.” The treaty also emphasized the construction of the fort as a location of “a well assorted store of goods, for the purpose of bartering with them on moderate terms for their peltries and furs.” Additionally, the treaty included a provision for the U.S. to pay up to $5000 in damages to U.S. citizens who could “legally prove” that their property had been stolen by the Osages “since the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States.” For signing the treaty, the band of “Little” Osages received $400 in presents, while the “Great” Osages received $800. Additionally, the Great Osages were to receive a yearly annuity paid at the new fort of $1000, while the Little Osages would receive $500. These were gifts that the Osages would have expected as part of the usual diplomatic ritual, not as payment for a land cession.

The stipulations in the treaty for the “reservation” were quite vague. Clark asserted ultimate sovereignty by including a statement saying that those “who observe[d] the stipulation of this treaty with good faith, shall be permitted to live and hunt, without molestation, on all that tract of country, west of the north and south boundary line,” which were lands where “the said Great and Little Osage, have usually hunted or resided.”45 In other words, Clark’s treaty gave the Osages permission to live where they had always lived, something that the Osages would surely have thought was silly had they properly understood the full text of the treaty. Even more important was the stipulation that this provision was also contingent on the fact that no white settlements were discovered to be in that region, or, even more significantly, if in the future “the

United States may think proper to assign the same as hunting grounds to other friendly Indians,” such as those who were removing west of the Mississippi.

These provisions are telling of the treaty’s connection to the federal government’s preparations for removal. The Treaty of Fire Prairie in 1808 was one of the most important pieces of early Indian removal policy implemented by the federal government. Not only had Clark obtained a thirty million acre land cession, but he also made sure to reserve to the United States the right to assign the other lands not yet ceded to other tribes at a future date. One of the ways that Clark ensured the U.S. could claim this right can be found in article ten, which stated that “[t]he United States receive the Great and Little Osage nations into their friendship and under their protection; and the said nations, on their part, declare that they will consider themselves under the protection of no other power whatsoever; disclaiming all right to cede, sell or in any manner transfer their lands to any foreign power, or to citizens of the United States or inhabitants of Louisiana, unless duly authorized by the President of the United States to make the said purchase or accept the said cession on behalf of the government.” Thus in putting themselves under the “protection” of the United States, which Lewis and Clark thought the Osages themselves had actually asked for, the Osages were putting themselves under ultimate U.S. sovereignty. Although the treaty was signed by dozens of Osage leaders, it would be a major point of contention among the Osages for decades to come, as other factions of the tribe argued that those who had signed the treaty did not have the authority do to so. The claims that the band of Osages that had signed the treaty did so fraudulently became even louder once it was clear that the U.S. thought it had actually acquired possession of land from the Osages. Those who
signed claimed that they thought they had been agreeing to share hunting territory with some Americans and other Native groups.

The two examples discussed in this chapter show how differently some U.S. agents in the West approached the problem of asserting U.S. sovereignty over the Louisiana Territory. Federal policies in the West were implemented haphazardly, in part because of the different perspectives of the different individuals who were put in charge of that implementation. Sibley’s actions in the old Southwest reveal that the United States government had a long history of peaceful relationships with plains tribes like the Comanches that would later be forgotten by subsequent officials in the West and in Washington. This highlights the historical amnesia with which the federal government often approached Indian affairs, and it also shows that there were other ways besides land cessions through which the United States tried to assert its claims of sovereignty over the region.

Lewis and Clark’s dealings with the Osages and the signing of the treaty of 1808 reveal a different approach. Trade was used as a threat, and Lewis and Clark made little effort to develop real relationships with the tribes near their base in St. Louis. Unlike Sibley, they already assumed U.S. sovereignty over the region. But perhaps the most important reason to discuss these early developments between U.S. officials and the Osages is because they are incredibly revealing of the U.S. government’s early plans for removal. Jefferson, Lewis, Clark, Wilkinson, and many others desired Indian removal immediately after the Louisiana Purchase, and they began taking steps to achieve that goal. Indian removal thus did not begin in the East, but in the West, where the U.S. government began trying to clear tribes out of the way to make room for the tens of thousands of migrants that were already coming, and where anticipated to come in the future.
Removal Policies in Practice Before 1830
Chapter 5

“They are the most intriguing set of people I have ever known” - David McClellan on the western Cherokees, December 2, 1829

The preceding chapter laid out the ways in which the federal government was deeply involved in early removal efforts, even though that involvement was haphazard, inefficient, and often based on poor information. In Exiles and Pioneers, John P. Bowes argued that before 1830, many Native people made the choice to move west because they had economic and familial connections that made them feel that migration was a good choice. Bowes also argued that the federal government had essentially no role these early Native migrations into the trans-Mississippi West, preferring instead to focus on Native decisions regarding movement into the West. This argument is important and undoubtedly true; Native people are too often seen as passive victims in grand federal plots. However, I believe the evidence from these early migrations shows that the federal government had a very important hand in encouraging these early removals and in shaping their outcome, most notably through all the land cession treaties that the federal government began negotiating with eastern and western Indian nations very early in the nineteenth century. Thus while Bowes is correct that “1830 and the Indian Removal Act need not be such preeminent benchmarks” and that the “history of removal also exists within a larger narrative of migration and within the natives’ understanding of the world around them,” the federal government was not uninvolved in the process, nor were the treaties signed before 1830 “treaties that foreshadowed the Indian-removal legislation to come.” Those treaties were
federal removal legislation being put into practice in both the East and the West in the first
decade of the nineteenth century.\footnote{Bowes, \textit{Exiles and Pioneers}, pp. 17, 18, 21.}

The federal government knew that both Native and white migration west of the
Mississippi was ongoing at the beginning of the nineteenth century and would only increase in
the future. It was also clear based on reports from western agents that the United States did not
have anything at all like control over any of these movements. Despite this knowledge, federal
officials began implementing policies that provided for Indian removal from the eastern half of
the United States into the trans-Mississippi West, like William Clark’s land cession treaty with
the Osages, which was considered necessary to make space for removing Indians. Actions like
these quickly overshadowed efforts to make the Indians U.S. allies through commerce, as John
Sibley had tried to do in the Southwest. This chapter will demonstrate continuity in federal
Indian policies from the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries, showing that
when viewed in a wider context, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 can best be seen as the
culmination of almost thirty years of policy initiatives, rather than the beginning of removal as a
policy initiative.

Historians writing in the 1980s and 1990s, like Francis Paul Prucha and William
McLoughlin, were so focused on drawing distinctions between a “Jeffersonian” Indian policy
aimed at “civilizing” Native people and a “Jacksonian” policy bent on removing them that they
have missed how deeply connected the ideas of “civilization” and “removal” were from the
beginning. They recognized that federal officials like Thomas Jefferson personally believed that
removal west of the Mississippi would ultimately be best for Native Americans, but have argued
that this was only an idea until Andrew Jackson put it into practice. Bowes, Stephen Warren, and Sami Lakomaki have done much to expand removal historiography beyond this narrative, but in emphasizing that removals and migrations were often initiated by Native people for their own reasons, these authors have deemphasized the role of the federal government in the process. I argue that it is necessary to also consider the federal government’s role if we are to gain a more complete picture of Native movements into the trans-Mississippi West. In this chapter, I show that even though there was no uniform policy and no certain information about the large and powerful Native populations in the West, federal officials dove headfirst into the removal project anyway. The beginning of Cherokee and Choctaw removal, both events that have usually been associated with the Jacksonian era and the Indian Removal Act of 1830, exemplify the deep federal investment in removal and the major problems that federal officials’ lack of accurate information caused during the attempted implementation of those removals.2

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The history of the violent Cherokee removal from Georgia in 1839 has so dominated the American historical consciousness and the historiography about Indian removal that the Cherokee experience has come to serve as the definitive experience for Native people who experienced removal. In the short but comprehensive book *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*, Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, two of the most prominent Cherokee removal scholars, admit that their focus on the Cherokee trail of tears “conveys the impression that removal was a uniquely Cherokee experience.” Acknowledging that this is not true, Perdue and

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Green mention that there were many “trails of tears” for other tribes, but they also claim that continued focus on the Cherokees is warranted because the Cherokees’ story can “exemplify a larger history” and because the history of their removal is the most well documented.\(^3\)

However, Perdue and Green do not acknowledge that the Cherokee removal in 1839 does not even fully exemplify the experience of removal among the Cherokee people themselves.\(^4\) Thousands of members of the Cherokee Nation went west in the decades before the 1830s, and under significantly different circumstances, that, if included in the removal story, shows how “removal” was a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century process, often initiated by Native people for their own reasons, but also promoted and encouraged by the federal government. The first permanent Cherokee migrants in particular changed the power dynamic of the old Southwest in important ways as they left complicated circumstances in the east.\(^5\)

Lacking the tempering force of British oversight after 1783, American settlers aggressively pushed the Cherokees out of valuable lands in the backcountry of North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Many Cherokees had sided with the British during the Revolution, which some Americans believed was enough justification for continuing a guerilla-style war

\(^3\) Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Viking, 2007), pp. xiv-xv. Focusing on removal only through the “trail of tears” framework is also prominent in other work that seeks to move beyond the focus on the Cherokee experience. See Mary Stockwell, *The Other Trail of Tears: The Removal of the Ohio Indians* (Yardley, Pa.: Westholme, 2014).

\(^4\) In *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: St Martin’s Press, 1995), Perdue and Green claim that their book is designed “to help students and other serious readers of history understand the complexity of Cherokee removal,” yet they focus almost completely on the events of the 1830s, giving only tacit mention to the multitude of debates over removal, and the removals that took place, decades before that time.

\(^5\) I am not the first to argue that too much emphasis has been placed on the Cherokee removal experience. In *Exiles and Pioneers*, John Bowes wrote “Images of the Cherokees on the Trail of Tears have epitomized both the removal experience and the final defeat of Indians residing east of the Mississippi” and “the Cherokee experience is not necessarily representative of removal among the Shawnees, Delawares, Wyandots, and Potawatomis.” (pp. 6-7)
against the Cherokees after the Revolutionary War concluded. These ongoing conflicts helped to create two major political divisions within the Cherokee Nation by the 1790s. Those who lived in the “Upper Towns” favored accommodation with the new United States, while those who had moved into the furthest southwestern part of the Nation and came to be known as the “Lower Towns,” continued to fight white Americans’ encroachment on their lands. Lower Town chiefs lent support to the anti-United States coalition of Native groups in the Ohio River valley that developed after the Revolution and lasted until a major defeat of Native forces at the battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794. Because of these divisions within the nation and the confusion brought about by the haphazard adoption of various aspects of Euro-American culture, historian William G. McLoughlin has argued that “[b]y 1790 the Cherokees were no longer sure of their place in the universe,” that they “had lost control of their destiny as a people,” and were practically “a ruined people.”

McLoughlin built the argument of his influential book *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* based on this idea, explaining that out of the desperate situation they faced in the 1790s, the eastern Cherokees successfully revolutionized their society in a way that they hoped would allow them to fight continued American encroachment on their lands. However, in making this argument, McLoughlin reinforces the idea that removal was a phenomenon of the 1830s. He acknowledges that many thousands of Cherokees moved west of the Mississippi prior to the 1830s, but McLoughlin does not see that those movements were both removals pushed by the federal government as part of its overall Indian policy and part of a calculated Cherokee strategy designed to maintain sovereignty, just as the eastern Cherokees’ adoption of a new governmental

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structure was also designed to protect their sovereignty. Instead, McLoughlin wrote that early westward Cherokee migrants were “frustrated and despondent” people who wanted “to leave a chaotic cultural order and try to start over again far away from the white man.” This was, of course, if they were not some of the even more wretched Cherokees who, in McLoughlin’s view, simply gave up in their effort to make sense of the changes in their lives “and turned to the bottle.”

Other scholars of the Cherokee Nation have been greatly influenced by McLoughlin’s interpretation of early Cherokee migrants west of the Mississippi. For example, Dianna Everett wrote that those Cherokees who went west at the beginning of the nineteenth century were “demoralized and disorganized” because they had become “virtually subjugated to the authority of a nascent United States Government.” She perhaps correctly asserted that those who went west were employing an old Cherokee political strategy whereby “in cases of irreconcilable difference, one or another faction . . . was free to withdraw and live elsewhere so that consensus could prevail,” but Everett insisted that the early westward emigrants were either “dissidents” or “traditionalists” who operated “in true Cherokee fashion . . . and preserved what remained of traditional lifeways in a new world.” In *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society*, Theda Perdue also presents a very stark binary: Cherokees either moved down the path of complete assimilation, or they clung even more closely to “traditional” ways of life.

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7 McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence*, p. 56.
8 ibid
9 Everett, *The Texas Cherokees*, pp. 9, 6.
10 Everett, p. 9.
Both these approaches dismiss the importance of earlier migrations and create an unnecessary traditional/non-traditional divide between eastern and western Cherokees in the early nineteenth century. Everett, whose work actually calls attention to early Cherokee migrants, insists that they were the “true” Cherokees, while McLoughlin mostly dismisses early migrants as traditionalists who gave up on trying to actually fight to preserve the Cherokee Nation. Both of these approaches are dangerous ways to write Native history, not just because of the blindness they demonstrate toward the role that federal removal goals had in the process of early westward migrations, but also because it makes cultural and political change mean becoming “not Indian.”

If Cherokees of the past could not change some aspects of their lives, even fundamental political, familial, and economic ones, and still be Cherokees, how can Native nations still exist today?

Additionally, the sources make it clear that going west was for many Cherokees a calculated political decision, especially for prominent political leaders. Cultural freedom was an important part of the search for sovereign spaces in the nineteenth century trans-Mississippi West—but cultural considerations were not divorced from the search for political and economic sovereignty.

I want to bring early Cherokee removal into the conversation Bowes and Warren have started that emphasizes Native choices in the processes of removal and migration, while also adding to that conversation by showing how the Cherokees used the federal government’s great desire for removal and lack of understanding about the West to their own advantage.

Those who went west and those who remained east should not be simplistically divided into those who adhered to more “traditional” Cherokee societal norms and those who adopted aspects of a Euro-American lifestyle. Both eastern and western Cherokees were changing and recognized that changes were necessary if they were going to survive as a nation. Both groups
faced this reality, but the eastern and western Cherokees were divided over what was the best strategy for maintaining their sovereignty and surviving as a people in the face of rapid U.S. expansion and federal officials’ increasing demands for land cessions, removal, and cultural changes. It is this aspect of the Cherokees’ removal story that should be told if any part of the Cherokee story is going to be used to exemplify the broader history of removal experienced by dozens of Indian nations throughout North America. The eastern Cherokees’ impassioned public relations campaign and lawsuits in the U.S. Supreme Court in the late 1830s were unique. Conflicts within Native nations over how to respond to the pressures of the expansion of settler colonists was not.¹²

Thus early Cherokee removals to the West were not, as McLoughlin, Everett, and other scholars have suggested, retreats from reality, for as I have already shown, the problems related to U.S. expansion followed the Cherokees immediately into the West. It seems clear that the earliest Cherokees who moved west of the Mississippi were those who had experience hunting there, liked what they saw, and decided to stay, perhaps for the convenience of being close to their hunting grounds more than anything else. Some reports by Spanish government officials in the 1780s show that a few small Cherokee settlements had been established on the western bank of the Mississippi River. Later, the Spanish government invited more Cherokees, along with any other Native groups who were willing, to come live on the west bank of the river as they tried to build a buffer to U.S. encroachment out of friendly Native nations. By 1795 small groups of Cherokees had already built permanent homes on the St. Francis River in what is now

southeastern Arkansas and Missouri, where they had been given permission to settle and rights to the land by the Spanish government. Other migrants to the West included some former Loyalists who had chosen to make permanent homes among the Cherokees.¹³

The flow of emigrants to those western settlements increased significantly after 1795, a development that seriously concerned the Osages. For centuries, the Osages had been able to keep the small bands of eastern hunters away from the prime hunting territory on the upper Arkansas River, but the Cherokees who settled in Arkansas in the 1790s were different. They came with the intention of staying, and thus chose to fight back against Osage attacks because they wanted a new home territory for themselves in addition to access to the plains hunting grounds and trade networks. This desire to live in the same wooded region that bordered the plains made the Cherokees a more formidable opponent for the Osages than the Comanches had ever been, because the Comanches’ horse herds and reliance on the buffalo for subsistence kept them from venturing into the Osages woodland homes except on very rare occasions. The Osage and Comanche conflict had always been over hunting territory, and conflict was usually intermittent since the territory over which they fought was so large. But the same was not true once the Cherokees arrived on the Osages’ eastern borders. The Cherokees were the first settler colonists to truly disrupt the Osages’ pattern of dominance in the old Southwest.¹⁴

Meanwhile, in the eastern Cherokee Nation, rumors began to spread in September 1801 about new U.S. demands for land cessions. Concerned, some eastern chiefs approached federal representatives.


¹⁴ DuVal’s *Native Ground* outlines the many ways that the Cherokees acted like settler colonists, especially toward the Osages, although her book does not explicitly employ a settler colonial framework. Removal historiography could greatly benefit from using recent developments in settler colonial theory.
officials about “the propriety of looking out West of the Mississippi for an eventual residence” because some Cherokees “already [had] a settlement of nearly one hundred gunmen” in the West. All the available evidence suggests that there was regular contact between the earliest western Cherokee migrants and those who remained east in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and so it seems logical that those who heard about the opportunities available in the West would also consider migrating there themselves. The federal officials who heard this request were delighted, because they thought it would give them another opportunity to get a land cession from the eastern Cherokees.

Thus at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Cherokee migration west of the Mississippi began to increase significantly and was coming to serve larger purposes than just access to hunting grounds. Unlike McLoughlin, who insisted that “civilization” was the only “plan that guided white-Indian relations from 1789 to 1833,” Everett concedes that then-president Thomas Jefferson had begun encouraging “a resettlement policy” that promised aid to Cherokees who would give up their claims to lands in the east and migrate west of the Mississippi. Other historians have noted that Jefferson privately expressed his belief that Indian removal was ultimately the outcome he desired, but believed that Jefferson did not act on those beliefs, instead continuing to implement a “civilization” policy. I argue that although Jefferson

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15 Report of a conference with the Cherokees at West Point, Tennessee, attended by General James Wilkinson, Colonel Benjamin Hawkins, and Colonel A. Pickens, September 6, 1801, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1.


17 Everett, *Texas Cherokees*, p. 10.

and his successors continued to give support to “civilization” policies, their beliefs in the ultimate necessity of removal influenced their actions.

Immediately following federal officials’ arrivals in the newly-purchased Louisiana Territory, Jefferson began discussing the possibilities of removal with them. In letters sent to Henry Dearborn, Jefferson’s secretary of war, territorial governor James Wilkinson wrote that the number of Cherokees emigrating across the Mississippi to the already-established settlements on the St. Francis had recently “increased rapidly.” In the space of about three years, the settlement’s population had increased from about “sixty Families only” to well over one thousand people by a recent report. Wilkinson hoped that this would be only the beginning, although he cautioned that “an indispensable preliminary to the transfer of the Southern Nations, to the West of the Mississippi” was the creation of peace agreements with powerful western tribes, such as the Osages and Comanches, who Wilkinson believed outnumbered the white population of the West by at least three times.19 Just a few weeks later, Wilkinson reiterated the necessity of creating peace on the trans-Mississippi frontier as a precursor to removal: “I deem it absolutely essential to the presidential views, touching the transfer of the Southern Nations to the West of the Mississippi, that those Nations . . . which have already Established themselves on this side [of] that River, should be brought to a friendly understanding with the Osages,” a view which in part had led to the Treaty at Fire Prairie in 1808.20 Because he was actually in the West, Wilkinson could see that federal control over the West would be a necessary precursor to being

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able to implement removal the way the federal government wanted, and he tried to provide the information that would make that possible.

Reports from John B. Treat, the U.S. factor at the Arkansas Post, emphasized that Cherokee removal was already underway without any federal oversight at all. He also reported slightly different numbers of Cherokee residents at the St. Francis River settlements, noting to Dearborn that he had been told there were six hundred Cherokees living there. However, Treat seemed impressed that the population was so large, considering the chief of that group, whom he called Konnetoo, told him that the Cherokees had only established the town on the St. Francis a decade before. Treat himself had also noticed an “increase both of Choctaws & Chickasaws [coming] from over the Mississippi the year past [that was] very considerable.”21

In 1806, at Jefferson’s urging, the Cherokees’ agent Return J. Meigs was able to convince some of the Lower Town chiefs to sign a land cession treaty. Meigs promised a lot of special considerations to these chiefs, including money and specific grants of choice lands in fee simple title, and so historians have speculated that Meigs strong-armed them into making the land cession. Upper Town leaders, and indeed most Cherokees, were extremely upset by the Lower Town chiefs’ land cession. Historians have yet to fully explain why it was the Lower Town residents and their leaders, who just a decade earlier had been the most avid supporters of armed resistance against American expansion, were the ones who signed the 1806 treaty that ceded massive amounts of land to the United States. Perdue and Green argue that individual chiefs, especially the old ones who dominated the Lower Towns, “tended to think in terms of their towns rather than the Nation. Some appeared to be entirely too self-serving, a legacy perhaps of the

individualistic ethos of warriors.” This explanation makes sense, but it is difficult to know for sure exactly what motivated the chiefs to make these cessions. The treaty of 1806 did not make any stipulations regarding removal, but it was also the third treaty that the U.S. had negotiated with the Cherokees within the year, and it is clear that some Cherokees were ready to go west.

In December 1806, Treat reported that “the Delawares & Cherokees living on the St. Francis have repeatedly urg'd the Sending [of] a Supply of goods to their usual crossing place which I have complied with.” These Cherokees sought additional supplies because they were preparing for a hunt and also planning for the spring arrival of “a number of Families [who were] expected to join the Cherokees from their Settlement in Tennessee.”

Thus some Cherokees may have seen the treaty of 1806 as the signal that it was time to move west. But for those Cherokees who opposed further land cessions, the treaty of 1806 was highly concerning because it gave up 15,000 square miles of prime hunting land. Doublehead, one of the principal signers of the 1806 treaty, was killed for his role in signing the land cession. After Doublehead’s murder, other Cherokees who had signed the treaty feared for their lives, prompting many of them to go west as well. During the turmoil that followed Doublehead’s death, Jefferson saw an opportunity to push removal as a solution. Writing to “the chiefs of the Upper Cherokees” in May 1808, Jefferson suggested that “[i]t may facilitate the settlement” of the Cherokees’ difficulties to know that the United States was ready “to give these [Cherokees]

22 Perdue and Green, The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears, pp. 36-37.
23 Letter from John D. Chisholm to Meigs, Jan. 24, 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of War regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1, in which he discusses the lands that Double head leased, justifying it by saying that it was necessary so that the Cherokees could learn how to farm. He also mentioned the two treaties of 1805 and said that they had been ratified.
24 John B. Treat to Henry Dearborn, December 31, 1806, Territorial Papers of the United States, Vol. XIV.
leave to go, if they choose it, and settle on our lands beyond the Mississippi.” Thus Jefferson asserted U.S. sovereignty over the west by declaring them “our lands,” even those “where some Cherokees [were] already settled.” However, he tried to entice the Cherokees to move by declaring that in the West “game is plenty,” and promised that the U.S. would “take measures for establishing a store” where they could obtain necessary supplies and that the U.S. would “still continue to be . . . friends there as much as here.” Thus while the treaty of 1806 was only a land cession, and contained no stipulations for removal or land exchange, it clearly prompted action on the part of some Cherokees, and federal officials like Meigs and Jefferson took advantage of every opportunity to encourage as much Cherokee movement west of the Mississippi as possible.

John Sibley also observed the increasing presence of Cherokees in the southwest after 1806. He reported “A Small Party of Cherokees Arrived here [in Natchitoches] in two Perogues from up Red River with Deer Skins to trade in the factory, & being the first Cherokees that ever were here and well behaved Indians, I treated them well with provisions.” Some of the Cherokees Sibley later encountered were probably Cherokee hunters from the Arkansas settlements, but this group told Sibley that they lived in a village further up on the Red River. For this group, then, Arkansas had not been far west enough. Living on the Red River provided even closer access to the buffalo herds on the plains and the possibility of contact with the Wichita and Comanche trade networks. But like the Cherokees on the Arkansas, who invited Delawares, Shawnees, and eventually many other groups to settle near or with them, the Cherokees in the southwest also allied with other groups. Also in 1807, Sibley learned of the

25 Thomas Jefferson to Cherokee chiefs, May 5, 1808, accessed through loc.gov

26 John Sibley to the Secretary of War, March 20, 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Regarding Indian Affairs, Roll #1.
arrival of a Pascagoula chief named Pinaye in Nacogdoches. Pinaye spoke to Spanish officials there, claiming to represent a united group of Pascagoulas, Cherokees, Shawnees, and Chickasaws who wanted Spanish permission to settle in Texas. A few years later, U.S. officials learned of another Cherokee village in the southwest, reportedly about fifty miles south of Nacogdoches, while one of Sibley’s successors, John Jamison, reported in 1816 that there were about a hundred Cherokees who resided within his southwestern Louisiana jurisdiction.27

Despite these ongoing migrations, the federal government continued to push the Cherokees for more land cessions, seeing removal as the most desirable possible outcome of federal Indian policies. Land cessions were the easiest way to convince Native people to move, even if no provisions were actually made in those cessions for removal assistance or stipulations for new lands in the West. And Americans east of the Mississippi were clamoring ever more loudly for the federal government to force Native people off increasingly valuable lands in North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and other states. This situation makes it worth reconsidering how much power the federal government actually had in the East, since much of the time it was merely reacting to the demands of the states and their citizens to remove Indian populations. Additionally, during this early part of the nineteenth century, federal officials could only succeed in completing removals when they got Native cooperation or acquiescence from a portion of a tribe that believed moving west was ultimately to their own advantage. However, as these early removals played out, federal officials began to understand more clearly that to get more removals from the East, there was business that they would have to take care of in the West.

First, they needed to stop the conflict between the Cherokees and the Osages that had been ongoing since the Cherokees had first begun to settle in the West. Despite several attempts to create permanent peace agreements between the two nations, the conflict had continued to grow, showing that ultimately, the United States was still a weak political and economic force in the West. The Cherokees continued to escalate the conflict with the Osages not only because of their growing population and continued desire to access hunting and trading opportunities on the plains, but also because they had drawn other eastern emigrant nations who wanted the same things into an effective alliance against the Osages. Thus putting a stop to the conflicts with the Osages became a top priority for federal officials because removal would not look like an attractive option if the West was a bloody battlefield of incessant warfare between Native groups.28

The Cherokees and their eastern allies had been gaining the upper hand in the conflict throughout the 1810s. In 1816 William Lovely, who had been appointed the U.S. agent for the western Cherokees in 1813, had tried, without permission from his superiors, to negotiate a land cession from the Osages of territory in northwestern Arkansas to create a buffer zone between the two groups. The region was known as “Lovely’s Purchase,” but the entire Osage Nation did not agree that the land had actually been ceded to the United States, and the purchase did little to stop the Cherokees and their allies from going on the offensive. In the fall of 1817, the Cherokees perpetrated an attack on the Osages in which at least thirty Osages were killed, at

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28 See Stephen Warren, *The Shawnees and Their Neighbors* for more information on the structure of the anti-Osage alliance in the West. For examples of the ongoing conflict, see William Clark to the Secretary of War, September 12, 1810, *Territorial Papers*, Vol. XIV. For eastern officials’ concerns that this alliance of eastern emigrants might upset federal attempts to create a peace agreement and obtain another land cession from the Osages, see Return J. Meigs to the Secretary of War, February 17, 1816, *Territorial Papers*, Vol. XV, pp. 121-23
least one hundred were taken prisoner, and all of the crops that the Osages had stored at their
Verdigris River towns for the winter were destroyed. This attack, much more than Lovely’s
attempted land cession, led some Osage bands to think more seriously about a permanent, U.S.-
brokered peace agreement.29

In May 1818 Calhoun had instructed Clark to be as proactive as possible in getting land
cession treaties from the Quapaws and Osages to accommodate the demands of emigrating tribes
like the Shawnees, Delawares, and Cherokees, demands that were not unlike those made by
white settlers in the West. Calhoun emphasized the importance of the endeavor, writing that “the
President [James Monroe] is anxious to hold out every inducement to the Cherokees, and the
other Southern nations of Indians, to emigrate to the West of the Mississippi.”30 Clark responded
in October 1818, reporting to Calhoun that he thought he had finally achieved success by
convincing the Osages to sign a peace treaty.31 Clark was ecstatic at the prospect, as he had
already spent significant amounts of time and money up to that point trying to settle boundary
disputes between the Cherokees, Quapaws, and Osages.32 He also realized how important a
peace treaty was to the federal government’s larger plans for Indian removal, stating in his letter
to Calhoun that “knowing the views of the Government on the subject of Indian emigration to the
West of the Mississippi, [and] finding too that it was the intention of the Cherokees to demand of

29 Brad Agnew, “The Cherokees Struggle for Lovely’s Purchase,” *American Indian Quarterly* 2 (Winter
1975-76), pp. 347-61; Derek R. Everett, “On the Extreme Frontier: Crafting the Western Arkansas


31 Clark to Calhoun, October 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs,
Roll #2.

32 William Clark to William H. Crawford, December 7, 1816, Letters Received by the Secretary of War
relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2, reporting expenditure of $900 for boundary surveys.
the Osages the country West of their settlements, on the Arkansas, which the Osages were
determined not to cede to them, and believing the Shawnees may be induced to exchange their
lands in Cape Girardeau for lands on the Arkansas & White River, I thought it advisable to enter
into a treaty by which the Osages have ceded to the United States, the country north of Arkansas
from their old boundary line, to the three forks, with a width of Sixty miles, which will include a
large body of very fine land.”

The cession Clark referred to secured to the United States the territory that Lovely had
previously tried to purchase for the Cherokees. He hoped that this acquisition would satisfy the
western Cherokees who wanted better access to the plains from their Arkansas settlements, and
that it would also allow the United States to move the Cape Girardeau Shawnees to a more
favorable location, further away from the white settlers who were rapidly moving into Missouri.
Additionally, Clark reported that he had instructed Benjamin O’Fallon, an agent for the Missouri
tribes “to sound them on the subject of ceding a portion of their lands.” If that could be
accomplished, and combined with the “near thirty million acres” that the Quapaws had recently
ceded, then “an immense country [would be] at the disposal of the United States” so that eastern
officials could begin arranging the Indian populations of the West in the best way to promote
removal from the east.

Clark and other federal officials seemed optimistic about accomplishing the massive
removal project that some Americans who had actually been in the West thought would be
impossible. While scouting a location for a U.S. army fort on the Arkansas River in fall 1817,

33 William Clark to Calhoun, October 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian
Affairs, Roll #2

34 William Clark to Calhoun, October 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian
Affairs, Roll #2
Major Stephen Long of the Topographical Engineers had reported that he would make some effort to figure out “the claims of Indians [that had] not been extinguished by cession to the United States, legally authorised and confirmed; & the Inhabitants thereof, who have emigrated from other parts of the United States.” Long realized how much confusion there was about which Native groups claimed what, and which lands had been ceded, all information that the U.S. government would need to place eastern Native groups on specific plots of land in the West. Long’s report revealed that the situation on the southwestern frontier was quite complicated: “The Indian claims to this tract, [between the Arkansas and the Red River] have never been extinguished in such a manner as to give the United States a fair and unequivocal title to it; nor have the conflicting claims of different tribes been amicably adjusted either between themselves or between them and the United States.”

A few years later, while writing to Calhoun about the ongoing process of removing the Shawnees from Cape Girardeau, Clark mused about how the U.S. could further prepare for more removals and exchanges: “I am very much inclined to an opinion that it would be good policy to purchase at once, from the Osage & Kansas tribes, a tract of country for which they have had little use, extending from the Missouri river to the head of the Canadian Fork of Arkansas with a sufficient depth to enable the government to move the several tribes of Indians (from whom exchanges have been, and heretofore be made) to a country procured for that express purpose west of the boundary line of the new state of Missouri, and of the settlements in the Territory of Arkansas, and I have no doubt such a purchase might be effected, which I have reasons to believe would be very acceptable to the Indian emigrants, and not materially injure the Osage &

35 Stephen Long to General A. Smith, January 30, 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Re: Indian Affairs, Roll #2
Kansas, who have a very extensive country back in which they hunt.” Clark also believed that it was necessary to get all of the tribes in Missouri “under the entire control of the general government” to prepare for upcoming removals and the “disorders which will inevitably ensue between the Indians settled among the whites and their neighbours” once more Indians began arriving. Yet removal continued even as reports about the lack of true federal control in the West continued to come in.

Preparation for removal was occurring in other parts of the West as well. Around the same time, Calhoun also received a report from Lewis Cass, Clark’s counterpart further north, who wrote that some of the agents he supervised had recently obtained land cessions from several western tribes. Cass was concerned because this cession was not strictly necessary at that moment, and thought it would only encourage “every adventurer” to go there and possibly make more mischief for the government to handle later. However, Cass was happy to report that representatives of “the Six Nations from New York” had recently been in the area looking at some of the ceded land. Cass thought that the Six Nations representatives had been attracted to that particular section of land and might be convinced to remove there.

Preparations for removal were also ongoing in the Southwest. Colonel William A. Trimble, for example, wrote to then-secretary of war John C. Calhoun that the Caddos and the other small Native groups who lived in Louisiana could be easily induced to cede their lands and

36 Clark to Calhoun, June 25, 1820, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #3
37 Clark to Calhoun, January 20, 1821, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #3.
38 Cass to Calhoun, Nov. 11, 1820, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating Indian Affairs, Roll #3.
move west of a proposed new boundary line with the United States, but only if they were guaranteed protection from the encroachment of American settlers. Trimble also believed that the federal government should establish treaties with other tribes not immediately threatened by settlers’ encroachment “for the purpose of settling their boundaries; and to explain to them the laws of the United States, in relation to Indians; & the determination of the executive to protect them in their rights.” In other words, he was also interested in making sure that the West was prepared for more Native migrants. Taking preventative measures was the best way for the federal government to be able to get the orderly removal of all the Native nations from the east.

Calhoun forwarded information from these reports to Andrew Jackson in late 1818, writing that “a considerable portion” of the lands that had recently been obtained from the Quapaws and Osages was “not intended to be brought immediately into the market” for purchase by white settlers because it could “become the means of exchanging for lands held by the Southern Indians on this side of the Mississippi.” Jackson, who had recently negotiated several treaties with southeastern nations following the Creek War and the War of 1812 was thrilled with Calhoun’s news about the western land cessions, perhaps giving him and other federal officials a false perception of the reality of federal power in the West. Jackson had been unable to get land cessions from the southeastern nations that were as large as he had desired following the conclusion of the war. Newly available western lands were another potential inducement he could hold out, baiting groups like the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws with the idea of exchanging their eastern lands for lands in the West that he promised would be theirs forever.

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Thus land cessions in the west in the second decade of the nineteenth century were a vastly important part of the federal government’s removal plans because they allowed for the idea of “land exchange” to be put into practice. Removal up until that point had been encouraged by the U.S. government, but it had been done so haphazardly that it would create more problems in the West than it was solving in the east. Going forward, removal would need to be managed better, and the first step was to control where Native people settled once they made the move west.40

The second obstacle federal officials thought they faced to getting all of the Cherokees to move west of the Mississippi was the fact that the Cherokees who already lived in the West did not have (in their minds) any actual rights to the lands where they were living. Although the earliest Cherokee migrants west of the Mississippi had been given permission and land titles by the Spanish government, and Jefferson had encouraged their migration immediately after the Louisiana Purchase, the U.S. government did not officially recognize any of the Cherokees’ land claims in the West. By 1816 this had become a serious problem because the West was becoming so crowded. The federal government knew that the Cherokees were scattered in villages throughout the West even though the majority of their settlements were in Arkansas Territory. Rounding them all up and placing them on a single reservation was a highly desirable goal.

Settling the Cherokees in a specific place was even more desirable because of their ongoing conflicts with the Osages. Federal officials believed that this conflict could not be resolved until the Cherokees had a designated western territory, which would hopefully prevent them from warring against the Osages for space, and especially for access to valuable western

40 John C. Calhoun to Andrew Jackson, November 16, 1818, Papers of John C. Calhoun: Volume 3, pp. 272-73.
hunting grounds. Osage and Cherokee war parties regularly conducted raids against each other’s settlements in which many horses and captives were taken. Both sides regularly blamed each other for murders and other outrages. As the conflict showed no signs of abating despite significant investments of government time and money, federal officials began to worry that reports of the bloodshed would prevent them from being able to persuade other Native groups from also removing to the region.41

Despite the fact that warfare with the Osages had been ongoing almost since the earliest Cherokee arrivals, many Cherokees had done well for themselves in the West, and they were eager to secure title to their lands for reasons totally unrelated the federal government’s removal goals. While federal officials were fretting about the big picture of total removal and their own lack of control over it, the Cherokees and other removed groups were busy establishing their own political and economic ties to the West. One of the earliest observers of some of the western Cherokees’ settlements was Captain John R. Bell, who had been part of a U.S. army expedition to the central plains in 1820. He returned east by following the Arkansas River from its headwaters in the Rocky Mountains back to the Mississippi. Near the end of his journey, he passed through part of the western Cherokees’ territory. Bell and his companions reported being given a good lunch at the “plantation” of Cherokee leader Black Fox one day. After departing from Black Fox’s prosperous farm, Bell’s party “passed a number of Indian plantations which appeared to be well cultivated with cotton corn sweet potatoes, beans & pumpkins.” Bell was

41 DuVal, The Native Ground, pp. 208-26. Federal officials in Washington often received reports that various peace deals between the two nations had been struck, but those reports often turned out to be false alarms. See John C. Calhoun to Captain William Bradford, August 25, 1818, Papers of John C. Calhoun: Volume 3, p. 67. For reports about the ongoing conflict, see Governor James Miller to John C. Calhoun, June 20, 1820, Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #3.
also impressed with the buildings on the Cherokee settlements that were “constructed of logs after the manner of those built by the whites, and appeared to be kept in as good order.” In general, the territory that the Cherokees occupied in Arkansas was, in Bell’s opinion, “of good soil, well adapted for cultivation and timbered with pine and oak and most other kinds of forest trees.” Even more impressive was the “Indian light horse” that patrolled the region. Any Native person caught by the light horsemen would be tried before the captain of the company and sentenced to whatever punishment was deemed necessary. However, if a white person was arrested for causing trouble, that person had to be turned over to the nearest U.S. authority.42

Considering that federal officials believed that the United States held ultimate sovereignty over, and had obtained much of the “Indian title” (i.e. usage rights) to, a significant portion of the Louisiana Purchase, designating some of that land for the Cherokees should have been a fairly simple process. However, because federal officials were ultimately interested in the westward removal of the entire Cherokee Nation, they decided to argue that the establishment of an official western Cherokee reserve required the complete cession of the eastern one. The federal government went all in, believing that it had the power and influence to force a complete Cherokee removal to the West. At least some of the federal officials directly involved had great conceptions of their own power. In February 1816 the eastern Cherokee agent, Return J. Meigs, wrote to William H. Crawford, who was then the secretary of war, that because the number of western Cherokee emigrants was so rapidly increasing, it had become necessary to try to get “an exchange of land with the Cherokee nation” that remained in the east. Meigs admitted that at first he had thought he could get the Cherokees to cede “their whole Country,” but this was proving

42 Bell, Journal of Captain John R. Bell, pp. 287-88.
difficult because the population of the western emigrants was “not large enough to induce an exchange.” In other words, the population of western emigrants who wanted secure title to western lands, and were willing to cede lands that they still claimed to have title to in the East to get a western reserve, were not a large enough group to override the objections of the Cherokees who still remained in the East.\(^43\)

However, in the spring of 1816, a group of U.S. representatives were again sent to try to negotiate with the eastern Cherokees for another land cession in exchange for lands in the West. But the easterners steadfastly refused “to make any cession of their lands in consideration of the Settlements which have been assigned to their countrymen.” Crawford wrote to the commissioners that they should insist that the western Cherokees were not to be given title to any lands “unless the Same extent of Country should be ceded by the Cherokees who have not emigrated, or at least an extent of country equal to what the emigrants could be entitled to, upon an equal partition of their lands according to their relative numbers.”\(^44\)

Federal officials had been successful in March 1816 in getting a delegation of eastern leaders who were in Washington, D.C. to sign two treaties. The first had ceded a small section of land within the limits of the state of South Carolina for $5,000, while the other had made some boundary line adjustments on the U.S., Cherokee, and Chickasaw borders and, perhaps more importantly, stipulated that the United States would be allowed to construct any roads it wanted through the Cherokee Nation and that U.S. citizens would be able to freely navigate all of the rivers running through the Cherokee Nation. In return for the boundary and travel concessions,


and as payment for damages related to past events involving American militia members, the Cherokees received $25,500.\textsuperscript{45} However, these treaties had also confirmed the Cherokees’ possession of a large section of land in what is now northern Alabama that Andrew Jackson had tried to essentially swindle away from them at the conclusion of the War of 1812.\textsuperscript{46}

But just a few months later, a three-man commission, headed again by Jackson, managed to find some chiefs who were willing to sign away the 2.2 million acre tract of land in Alabama for $5,000 immediately, and an annuity of $6,000 per year for ten years, in addition to compensation for improvements owned by Cherokees on the ceded lands. Even after this success, Jackson, and especially Tennessee’s governor, Joseph McMinn, were frustrated that the Cherokees still maintained possession to a significant amount of land within the claimed boundaries of Tennessee. Hoping to finally remove all of the Cherokees, federal officials employed the clever tactic of connecting title to lands for the western Cherokees to yet another land cession in the east. William McLoughlin, who wrote extensively about this period, considered the western Cherokees an afterthought in the impetus to get the treaty signed, but I argue that settling the western Cherokees on a designated tract so that even more removals could occur was just as important as other considerations.

On July 8, 1817, with a small delegation present representing the western Cherokees, federal officials were able to get the treaty they wanted, but only after more than a week of intense debate. The treaty that was eventually signed contained provisions for a land cession and designated specific boundaries for the Cherokee Nation in the West, but it was only signed by a


\textsuperscript{46} See McLoughlin, \textit{Cherokee Renascence}, for a more detailed discussion.
portion of the delegates who were present, and it was purposely vague. The treaty was clear that the Cherokees had agreed to cede over 600,000 acres of land in Georgia and Tennessee, but made the decision to migrate optional. The U.S. negotiators had hoped to force complete removal by saying that those who chose not to take the government’s offer for assistance in removing would have to accept a 640 acre reservation and become a U.S. citizen, thus effectually dissolving the Cherokee Nation east of the Mississippi. The treaty could not contain this stipulation for dissolution, however, because the commissioners realized they would not be able to get any of the chiefs to sign the treaty if it was explicitly included. The treaty did result in a significant increase in westward migration, but it was only a partial success from a federal point of view. Many people hoped that the new territory designated for the Cherokees in the West would be theirs permanently. And even if there were other hostile Native groups and a significant number of white settlers already west of the Mississippi, intriguing hunting and economic opportunities awaited.47

After the 1817 treaty was signed, Andrew Jackson and the other men who had been commissioned to get the treaty signed wrote a private letter to the secretary of war in which they revealed not only the level of bribery that was involved in getting the treaty signed, but how much they had depended on western Cherokee leaders to get the signatures that they needed. To get “the consent of the the reservees for whose benefit the reservations were made on the north bank of the Tennessee by the treaty of 1806,” some of whom had rented their reserves and gone west, Jackson and the commissioners had to “pay to Individuals of this nation the sum of four thousand two hundred and twenty five dollars.” Additionally, they “were compelled to promise

to John D. Chisholm,” a prominent western leader, “the sum of one thousand dollars To stop his mouth and attain his consent.” The commissioners also paid a hundred dollars to each of “the chiefs from the arkansaw . . . for their expences here.”

Most of the eastern Cherokees were unhappy about the 1817 treaty, but felt there was little they could do to undo it. Eastern leaders wrote frustratedly to federal officials in 1819 that “We have now surrendered to the United States a large portion of our country for the benefit of those of our Countrymen who have emigrated to the Arkansas and we hope that the Government will now strictly protect us from the intrusions of her bad Citizens and not solicit us for more land.”

Great enmity had developed between the eastern and western Cherokees, and neither side wanted to have much more to do with the other. In January 1818, a council of seven chiefs who were designated “as Chiefs of the Arkansaw Tribe” told Governor McMinn and Sam Houston, then the sub-agent for the Cherokees, that they wanted the president to “view us as a separate and distinct Tribe or Family of his Red children, who are not to be under the Government or control, of any arrangement or Law, that may be made by the Cherokees who reside east of the Mississippi.”

The group also argued that since up until their current request, they had still been considered a part of the Cherokee tribe, they were due a portion of the annuities that had previously been paid to the eastern Cherokees. The chiefs also assured U.S. officials that there were “great numbers that are now ready to move” west of the Mississippi, and there were “many more [of] which will set out, so soon as [Grass] will be sufficient to support their stock.” However, the chiefs were concerned that rumors about the “very great scarcity of Bread in the Arkansaw Country . . .

48 U.S. Commissioners to George Graham, July 9, 1817, from correspondence of Andrew Jackson on loc.gov

49 C. Hicks on behalf of Cherokee Delegation, March 5, 1819, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2.
would stop these emigrants until next winter, unless some assurance could be given by you that Bread could be had.” They had even told the Cherokees already in Arkansas to do what they could to raise enough corn and clear enough land for the settlers who would soon be coming. They promised to “be the constant friends of the American People,” emphasizing their loyalty to the United States, but only so that they could achieve their own goals.50

In August 1819, the western Cherokees’ agent, Reuben Lewis, reported that while traveling near the mouth of the White River, he met a party of 211 Cherokees who were emigrating west. They were in a very bad condition, and so Lewis purchased food for them and arranged for boats to transport them up the Arkansas River to the Cherokee settlements that were the group’s destination.51 Additionally, western Cherokee leaders also reported that “A great many of our people in the old nation are already enrolled to come to this country, but those people who are opposed to the emigration keep reporting such things as prevent our people from coming on.” Even though another round of migrants went after the 1817 treaty, the federal government continued to push for more Cherokee removals, even while removal without direct federal intervention continued.52

McMinn in particular pushed for further measures to ensure complete Cherokee removal. He wrote to Calhoun in November 1818 that at his most recent meeting with the Cherokee

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50 Deputation of Cherokee chiefs from Arkansas, in Tennessee, in the presence of Jos. McMinn, the Governor of Tennessee, and Sam Houston, sub agent for the Cherokees, Toulentuskey, Toochelor, The Glass, Capt. Spring, Colo.? Brown, Capt. McLemore? John Thompson, and James Rogers, who was the interpreter, January 14, 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2.

51 Reuben Lewis to the Secretary of War, from the Cherokee Agency in Arkansas, August 15, 1819, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2.

council they “roundly objected” to his apparent offer of $100,000 to cede their remaining lands. They had also rejected McMinn’s subsequent offer of double the amount. Despite these refusals, McMinn was totally convinced removal west of the Mississippi was the only way. He reported that since December of 1817, an additional 718 families had signed up to receive federal help in removing, adding to western Cherokee population that by McMinn’s own calculations was already nearly half of the nation. He later wrote that, “If it is desirable to perpetuate their nations existence & name & I think they strongly desire it, they must take new ground, where the pressure of white population will not be great for many years to come. Every thing short of a general movement will be ineffectual. It will be only improvising to gain time. From the bottom of my heart I wish them well.” McMinn, perhaps unknowingly, had picked up on an important aspect of removal. The Cherokees and other Native groups were moving to the West to preserve their national sovereignty. The Western Cherokees’ desire to be considered a separate nation from the Cherokees who remained east was especially indicative that maintenance of sovereignty was one of the main reasons to move west.

John Jolly, a western Cherokee leader, emphasized the civilization of those Cherokees who were migrating, writing to Calhoun in January 1818 “Father, you must not think that by removing we shall return to the savage life you have learned us to be herdsmen and cultivaters and to spin & weave our women will raise the cotton and the indigo & spin and weave cloth to

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53 McMinn to Calhoun, November 29, 1818, Papers of John C. Calhoun: Volume 3.

54 Meigs to Calhoun, Feb. 10, 1819, Letters Received Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2. McMinn’s estimate was quite inaccurate, although the exact number of emigrants, and the number of those who had signed up to emigrate, was highly disputed. The eastern Cherokees insisted that no more than 3,500 had gone and expressed interest in going. However, other historians’ estimates indicate the number of Cherokees already in Arkansas by this time could easily have been closer to 5,000. See C. Hicks on behalf of Cherokee Delegation, Feb. 22, 1819, Letters Received by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2.
cloathe our children by means of schools here numbers of our young people can read and write, they can read what we call the preachers book sent from the great spirit to all people.”

He even tried to argue that the Cherokees were truly becoming white: “We find that by intermarriages with our white brethren we are gradually becoming one people. These connections are already numerous & are increasing.” Thus the western Cherokees were just as interested as those who remained east in promoting themselves as “civilized” Indians, hoping such reports would favorably influence the federal government’s opinion of them. Moving west was not a retreat from reality, but a calculated response to the problems related to white expansion, and the emphasis on their own supposed “whiteness” was one of the ways that they attempted to get what they wanted out of their westward move from the federal government.

A delegation of the eastern Cherokee chiefs in Washington, D.C. in February 1818 also emphasized the development of their own civilization, saying that they had laws written in books like the white people that were read to the Cherokees. They also stated that while “The Light of education has fell upon us only in an oblique manner” the Cherokees were in the process of improving themselves so that “we may with confidence assure ourselves that we shall participate with our white brothers in the enjoyment and advantage of the best of all earthly Governments.” Both delegations of Cherokees were doing their best convince the federal government that the Cherokees were their allies and had achieved a level of “civilization” that should require the government to continue to recognizing their sovereignty. Thus each side seemed to have come to consider itself the “true” Cherokee Nation, and to have made the decision (either to stay or to

55 John Jolly to John C. Calhoun, January 28, 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2.

56 Letter from the Cherokee delegation in Washington, Feb. 5, 1818, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2.
go) that was in the real best interest of the Cherokee people. These Cherokee delegates’
arguments reveal that seeing their divide as one over acceptance of “civilization” or preservation
of tradition is unhelpful. No one at the time viewed the situation that way, and neither should
historians. Such a perspective would certainly have annoyed eastern chief Path Killer, who had
written a frustrated letter to the secretary of war in October 1817 complaining that the local white
population was insistent that the Cherokees wanted to go to west so they could be “hunters like
their forefathers and return to that state against which [was] the life of our forefathers.” Path
Killer said his people had no desire to live entirely as their forefathers had, and resented the
insinuation that the Cherokees would not and could not change.  

An interesting twist to the Cherokees’ removal story involves those who briefly lived in
Arkansas, but who quickly moved on to Texas. The story of these Cherokees is important to
discuss because not only does it show the variety of removal experiences had by different
Cherokees, but it also demonstrates that maintaining sovereignty was often the principle goal of
Cherokees who moved west, a goal also heavily influenced by the attraction of western trade
routes. It seems clear that conflict among the western Cherokees, who were no more united in
their thinking than the eastern Cherokees about the 1816-1817 treaties or about how to deal with
the Osages, contributed to the movement of more Cherokees south of the Red River. The sources
are extremely limited, so it is difficult to know.  

Many Cherokees may simply have been seeking better economic opportunities away from the conflict with the Osages, or were already

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57 Path Killer to Secretary of War, October 28, 1817, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2

58 In his journal, Captain John R. Bell wrote in 1820 that “the Chiefs are divided on the question of peace or war with the Osages.” p. 290.
feeling surrounded by the increase of white settlers in Arkansas, which by 1821 numbered at least 3,000, topping the Cherokees’ population of about 2,600. What is abundantly clear, however, is that the move south into Texas by several hundred Cherokees was a calculated political move in the search of a sovereign space of their own. Perhaps the recent negotiations with the United States had led some Cherokees to believe that the United States no longer had their best interests at heart and would never given them the kind of sovereign security that they sought. Leaving the boundaries of the United States was one of their only remaining options.

The evidence suggests that in the winter of 1819-1820 a group of about two hundred Cherokees moved into a region on the south bank of the Red River known as Lost Prairie, probably led by Duwali, who had lived in the West for nearly a decade by that time. As previously reported by U.S. agents in Natchitoches, the Lost Prairie region, which existed where the present-day states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas merge, was a popular place for Native groups seeking refuge in the West. The area also attracted a lot of travelers, because Trammel’s Trace, the main road from Missouri to Texas, passed nearby. However, it seems that Lost Prairie was too crowded for the Cherokees, who complained in early 1820 to the U.S. agent at Sulphur Fork about the American settlers who lived nearby at settlements like Pecan Point. A band of about 300 Cherokees led by Duwali reappears in the historical record in 1822, when they were reported to be living not far north of Nacogdoches, in territory that belonged to Spain. It was a purposeful move, because the Cherokees almost immediately initiated contact with Spanish officials regarding the possibility that they could be given legal title to the lands they had chosen to settle on.

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The group of Cherokees led by Duwali were not the only Native people who believed that their best hope for maintaining sovereignty lay in Texas. Sixty miles south of Nacogdoches, a large group of Alabamas had settled on the Neches River. Nearby was a village of Coushattas. Both of those groups had been retreating further west ever since they had originally crossed the Mississippi around the turn of the century. Additionally, there were significant settlements of Choctaws and Chickasaws east of Nacogdoches. Other Cherokees remained at the village on the south side of the Red River that had been there since Sibley’s days, where they had also been joined by some Coushattas and Delawares. Some Delaware and Kickapoo bands had also moved into the territory between the Red and Canadian rivers, an area that by 1820 had become somewhat safer from Osage raids. These Delawares and Kickapoos traded with the Comanches, the Wichitas, and other groups further west.

West of these migrants’ settlements were the Wichita bands who had been pushed south because of past Osage raids. They were still the gateway to the plains and the Comanche trading empire, both of which attracted Native migrants to settle in the region, in addition to the possibility of finally securing a permanent home through a Spanish land grant. Colonel William A. Trimble reported in 1818 that game on the lower Red River in Louisiana had become extremely scarce because of the great increase in the Native population, and so the “small tribes” that resided there “subsist[ed] principally on vegetables and domestic animals.” Thus many of these tribes looked further west into Texas, where they hunted and traded regularly and “[carried]...

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60 Everett, Texas Cherokees, p. 22.
61 John Jamison to the Secretary of War, May 10, 1817, Territorial Papers, Vol. XV.
62 Trimble to Calhoun, August 7, 1818, in Morse, ed., Report to the Secretary of War
on, with traders from Red River, an extensive traffic, in horses and mules, which they [the Comanches] catch on the plains, or capture from the Spaniards.”

More than a decade after the Louisiana Purchase, the knowledge available to the federal government about tribes that lived on the plains was minimal, and would generally remain so well into the 1850s. It was a problem federal officials put off confronting, as they tried to focus on controlling the tribes that were already removing from the East. However, many U.S. officials in the West and in Washington realized that the outcome of the Indian removal project hinged on peaceful relations with the western tribes, yet they had a hard time overcoming preconceived notions about Native people and their ideas about their own power. Most of the early reports by U.S. officials that estimated the plains populations had some information about the Comanches, whose power and influence was great enough to transcend the usual language and cultural barriers that hindered U.S. comprehension of the enormity of the plains and the vast numbers of Native peoples who lived there. For example, William A. Trimble was able to describe the boundaries of what historians today recognize were the limits of the Comanche empire. Trimble also realized that because of the vast territory they controlled, the Comanches needed to be afforded a certain level of diplomatic consideration: “Before any measure is executed in relation to the establishment of a military post, or Indian boundary, it would be proper to hold a treaty with the [Comanches].” One of William Clark’s major annual reports (in which he was supposed to describe everything he knew about western Indians) did not even mention the Comanches, although he believed there were some “Roving Bands” who lived on the southern

63 Ibid

64 Ibid.
plains that were “called by different names but generally speak the same language” who had a population of about 20,000. Clark was probably speaking of the Comanches, even though he did not realize it. Trimble at least realized his own ignorance, writing that “Some of the tribes inhabiting that country, have not been included, because no certain information respecting them could be obtained.”

John Jamison had significantly more information about the tribes south and west of the Red River than William Clark did, especially the Comanches, whose population he estimated to be much closer to 50,000. He also reported “the several tribes within the province of Texas and other parts of New Mexico” were very friendly toward the United States and hostile to Spain. Jamison also wrote “[t]o hold the Indian in a state of good will towards the U. States, and supply them with some articles indispensable for their comfort, repairing their implements for hunting supplying them with rations whilst here, on business, the annual distribution of a few Presents together with judicious management on the part of the Agent, will in my opinion, realize the views of the Government in this section of the Union - no change therefore is deemed [expedient] under the superintendence of this Agency except the permanent appointment of a Gunsmith.” Armed with only small pieces of information like this, the federal government continued to pursue its removal goals into the next decade.

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65 William Clark to the Secretary of War, November 4 1816, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1.

66 John Jamison to William H. Crawford, November 20, 1816, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #1
Because of the success that the federal government had achieved in removing at least some of the Cherokees, it made sense to try the same for other southeastern groups. In October 1817, the acting secretary of war, George Graham, sent instructions to Andrew Jackson to open negotiations with the Chickasaws “for the extinguishment of their claim to the lands held by them within the limits of the states of Ohio and Tennessee.” Graham also stated that it was “particularly desirable that [the Chickasaws’] claim to the lands within the limits of Kentucky, should be extinguished” because those lands were “believed to be private property, and principally belonging to the officers and soldiers of the Virginia line and their representatives.”

After receiving word about the major land cessions in 1818 from the Quapaws and the Osages, which had supposedly opened up new spaces in the West for Native migrants, Jackson was also interested in getting another major land cession from the Choctaws. Mississippi had just become a state, and Alabama was in the process of becoming one as well, so the timing seemed perfect. However, the first two efforts to negotiate a land cession and exchange treaty in October 1818 and August 1819 had been met with little success. Frustrated, secretary of state John C. Calhoun sent Jackson and General Thomas Hinds back to the Choctaw Nation in the fall of 1820 to try again, this time armed with a $20,000 budget recently appropriated by Congress. During the negotiations, Jackson and Hinds promised the Choctaws that they could have all the lands between the Red and Arkansas Rivers, which the two men believed had been included in the recent Osage and Quapaw land cessions. Jackson emphasized that if the Choctaws accepted, they

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67 George Graham to Andrew Jackson, October 25, 1817, Letters Received by the Secretary of War relating to Indian Affairs, Roll #2

would receive three times as much land as they were ceding. On October 10, following heated discussions and threats from Jackson about what would happen if the Choctaws did not agree to make the deal, the chiefs that had assembled for the meeting signed the Treaty of Doak’s Stand.  

However, internal political conflicts and disagreements over the authority of the chiefs who had signed the treaty kept the vast majority of the Choctaws in their eastern homes. Even more troublesome was the realization that the lands the United States had promised them had not been surveyed and, despite having been “ceded” by the Quapaws and Osages, were still occupied not only by a large Native population, but also an increasing white population. The white settlements at places like Pecan Point had only continued to grow, and when Arkansas had been separated from Missouri and become its own territory, the white residents of the region tried to incorporate themselves into what they called “Miller County,” and wanted to be included within the boundaries of Arkansas.  

Those few Choctaws who did move west after the treaty was signed had a difficult time. Mississippi resident Hugh W. Wormeley wrote to Calhoun in June 1823 that the Choctaws “who migrated to those [western] lands are now in a scattered and unsettled situation from a total ignorance of the boundaries of their land which as I have been informed has never been pointed out to them nor a formal possession given them by any constituted authority of the United States.” Wormeley had also learned that the western Choctaws had suffered from attacks by other western Indians, and he feared that this would discourage those who remained east from

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also migrating. U.S. officials had been incredibly eager to get the Choctaws out of the East, but they lacked the manpower and the authority implement that removal in the way that they wanted.\(^71\)

An agency was shortly thereafter established for the western Choctaws. However, by 1825, William McClellan, the agent, reported that fewer than eighty Choctaws had arrived at his agency looking for assistance.\(^72\) Realizing that the presence of American settlers in the region promised to the Choctaws was part of the problem preventing the Choctaws from removing West, Calhoun finally admitted to a Choctaw delegation that was in Washington, D.C. that the federal government had made a mistake. He tried to get the Choctaws to accept a change to what lands they had been promised so that the western boundary of Arkansas Territory could be drawn to include the settlements in Miller County. However, he offered no compensation for the change, and instead threatened the Choctaws, telling them that the change in the line would be “but a few miles,” and if they agreed, the Choctaws would have “a quiet and undisturbed possession of the immense Country lying between the Arkansas and Red River.” However “Should the line on the contrary be drawn any where to the East . . . there is no likelyhood that such a boundary would be permanent, as there is every reason to believe that the people of that Territory would never rest satisfied until the Indian Title was extinguished to its Western Boundary.”\(^73\)


\(^72\) William McClellan to James Barbour, October 25, 1825 and William McClellan to John Eaton, March 12, 1829, in Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Choctaw Agency West, Roll #184.

\(^73\) Calhoun to Choctaw delegation, November 9, 1824, Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll #1.
Unfazed by Calhoun’s threats, the Choctaws held firm, and eventually only agreed to make a slight adjustment to the boundary line if they were compensated accordingly. The white residents of the region were outraged that federal officials had not been able to resolve the boundary issue so that the majority of their settlements could be included within the limits of Arkansas Territory. It was an unthinkable reversal of events: lands that white American citizens had claimed were going to be ceded to Indians and the citizens who lived on them were going to be forcibly removed. Despite numerous protests from Miller County residents and their representatives, in this instance the federal government held firm in its decision because Indian removal was ultimately such an important goal.74

Thus as early as the 1810s, removal was already the paramount Indian policy shaping the actions of the United States and many of its officials in the West. Civilization was still an ideal, but it was believed that “civilization” could only be accomplished in the West. However, anyone who knew anything about the west and the vast numbers of white Americans who had already migrated there knew that this claim was a false premise on which to base removal. Removing Indians to the west would not remove Indians from the white frontier. The fact that removal continued to be promoted as a compassionate policy despite most officials’ actual knowledge of the situation in the West shows just how important removal was to the federal government. But even though removal was desired, not all federal officials were excited about the time, effort, and financial commitments that would be necessary to achieve it. As Calhoun noted grimly to James

74 Henry Conway to James Barbour, March 15, 1825, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Arkansas Superintendency, Roll #29; Petition dated July 10, 1825, ibid; memorial dated October 25, 1825, ibid.
Monroe in 1824, western tribes would have to be shuffled around yet again to make room for the ever-increasing numbers of eastern groups going west. Calhoun estimated that it would cost at least $30,000 to again move the Osage and Kansas nations out of the way. In an effort to prevent future confusion about the western U.S. boundaries, in 1825 Congress officially designated the territory between Arkansas and the Mexican border, from the Red River north to the southern border of Missouri, as “Indian Territory.”

By 1828, two years before the Indian Removal Act passed Congress, tens of thousands of Indians had already migrated west of the Mississippi and were living either in Indian Territory, Texas, Arkansas, or Missouri. Because many bands migrated to places of their own choosing, very little information about them exists. This is especially true of the groups that went to Texas. In addition to the migrant population, the populations of those groups already in the West remained significant, despite substantial losses among the Quapaws, Osages, Wichitas, and Caddos. The Comanche population was actually expanding, about to reach a peak of upwards of 40,000.

From the perspective of federal officials, the process of separating Indian nations from the U.S. frontier, which had been ongoing since the end of the Revolution, was barely succeeding. Removal was occurring so slowly and haphazardly that white American settlers were constantly either catching up with, or jumping ahead of, Indian migrations, overtaking lands that were supposed to remain “empty” for removing Indians. It is thus unsurprising that federal officials, especially congressmen with angry constituents, were frustrated with the haphazard

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75 Calhoun to Monroe, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs, Vol. II*. See also George Graham to William Clark, March 26, 1817, *Territorial Papers*, Vol. XV, which describes even earlier concerns about the rapid growth of the necessary expenditures related to Indian affairs because all of the land cession treaties that had been and were being signed.
implementation of removal and eager to support Andrew Jackson’s new proposals regarding Indian removal after he took office in March 1829. Pragmatists could support Indian removal because it was supposed to lessen costly conflicts in border regions. Additionally, for the expansion-minded, the idea of Indian removal was about providing space for white Americans. Yet none of these arguments were based in reality, revealing ignorance and the fact that many people simply wanted the Indians gone no matter what.76

Writing from the Presbyterian mission among the western Cherokees in Arkansas, Reverend Cephus Washburn, an advocate of removal and civilization as federal policies, told Thomas McKenney in February 1830 that the western Cherokees were being held back from becoming a “useful part of the American population” by the rampant whiskey traffic from Arkansas. Washburn had lived among the Cherokees before their migration across the Mississippi, and he had hoped that removal would be the solution. Unfortunately, he found that “The evil is not diminished in the least. Indeed it is greatly increased.” He accused everyone who traded with the western Cherokees of being culpable in the liquor business. Perhaps most disturbing for McKenney was Washburn’s belief that once the tribes remaining in the southeast found out “to what extent this ruinous traffic is carried on here, & that nothing, or next to nothing, is done to restrain it . . . & will justly feel it a strong argument against their emigration to this country.”77 Even before the Removal Act of 1830 was passed, top officials in D.C. had knowledge about how poorly the supposed benefits of removal were turning out.


Thus when the Indian Removal Act nonetheless passed Congress in the spring of 1830, it was not the beginning of the removal era, but instead it was the culmination of decades of effort by the federal government to rid the nation of the “Indian problem.” More significantly, it was an important step in funding the process of removal. The most significant aspect of the new legislation were the cash appropriations provided by Congress that were designed to speed up the process of Indian removal and make it happen on a much larger scale than before was the most significant aspect of the legislation. Prior to the passage of the bill, Congress had to authorize funds haphazardly, on a case-by-case basis when the War Department needed to negotiate a new treaty. This is not to say that no money was spent prior to the passage of the Indian Removal Act. Tens of millions of dollars had already been spent. Senator Thomas Hart Benton recalled in his memoirs that during a session of the twenty-sixth Congress in 1840, the congressmen had received figures which estimated that a total of $85 million had been spent on land cessions, presents, removals, and other expenses relative to Indian relations since 1789.78

The Indian Removal Act was designed to streamline the financial aspects of removal and completely fulfill promises the federal government had made to the states in the South to remove their Indian populations. The failed negotiations and lackluster results (caused by incomplete information and lack of control) of some removal treaties signed in the 1820s had made it clear that a concerted new effort was needed to get the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, Shawnees, and other groups out of the East. Andrew Jackson usually gets all the credit (or blame, depending on one’s perspective) for Indian removal. His influence on the process cannot be underestimated. His election and support for Indian removal were crucial to

getting the bill through Congress, yet few have acknowledged that his support for removal was so great in part because he had long been involved in the process. Becoming president simply gave Jackson new opportunities to develop removal policies he hoped would finally get the job done. Indian removal was an important goal for Jackson, but it was also a project with much deeper roots than Jackson’s administration.
Between 1803 and 1830, the federal government had been constantly involved in the removal project in some way, although it had employed many different policies to try to achieve removal (treaties, land exchanges, etc.) and had usually operated with little certain information about the Native people involved. During his tenure as the secretary of war, (1816–1824) John C. Calhoun had attempted a number of reforms to make the administration of Indian affairs more efficient. After Congress eliminated the needlessly complicated factory system, Calhoun moved Thomas McKenney, the superintendent of Indian trade, into a new position as the commissioner of Indian affairs, who would work within the War Department and report directly to the secretary of war. These developments helped to further shift the U.S. away from policies designed to make Indian allies through trade and move toward focusing on securing land cessions in the West to accommodate the growing number of Native and white settlers there.

However, none of these changes had made complete removal from the east and consolidation of Native groups in the West a reality. Few people were more frustrated by this fact than Andrew Jackson, who had been deeply involved in many early removal efforts. Thus one of his first major legislative goals after he was elected president in 1828 was to get Congress to provide more funds and manpower to speed up and streamline the process. But as new removal efforts that were authorized by the Indian Removal Act of 1830 were getting underway, problems related to the federal government’s lack of information about the Native populations in the West threatened to derail the entire project. Rumors regularly mixed in with the little real information
that reached Washington about the fearsome Comanches, who were believed to be hostile both toward the United States and the removing Indians. If true, Comanche hostility could pose a serious problem to federal removal plans. To head off any serious problems that would prevent the removals of the Creeks and Choctaws that were already well underway, Congress created a “federal Indian commission.” The men appointed to the commission would go west and obtain the most accurate information about the Plains Indians, while also convincing them to accept U.S. sovereignty and the presence of the removing Indians. Ultimately, however, the commissioners did little to gain more accurate information, and what they did send seems not to have affected federal policy decisions. More importantly, the interactions that the commissioners facilitated during these endeavors actually helped removed and plains Indians create political and economic ties that were mutually beneficial and very much outside the control of the federal government. Additionally, the records of the commissioners’ attempts to understand and control the situation in the West are incredibly valuable for the insight they provide about Native perspectives at the time, which were much different than federal officials assumed them to be. Thus while the federal government continued to gain the upper hand over Native peoples in the East, it remained weak and ineffectual in the West well into the 1830s.

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The military was almost always the first option when the federal government felt it needed to control Native people. However, the vast space that was the West made foot soldiers stationed at forts seem like an outdated method for control. The vast western frontier and the nomadism of many of the Native people who lived there required troops capable of policing a much wider area. Thus in June 1832 Congress authorized the creation of six dragoon companies,
the first official mounted companies in the military since the cavalry was decommissioned at the conclusion of the War of 1812. However, the actual impetus for congressional action had been the outbreak of what appeared to be a new Indian war on the northwest frontier, led by Sauk chief Black Hawk. The uprising revealed to many just how ill-prepared the U.S. military was to cope with any significant Indian resistance on the frontier. With only about 6,000 men enlisted into seven infantry and four artillery regiments spread across the entire country, the potential of war with the Sauks and other western Indian nations seriously worried both Congress and white American settlers.¹

However, as was often the case in borderlands regions where power and control were fluid, the threat posed by Black Hawk and his followers was more rumor than reality. The war ended before the dragoon companies could even be organized. Since the process had already been started, and the military’s deficiencies made more obvious than usual, Congress decided to deploy the mounted infantry companies to the West anyway, assuming that other conflicts were likely to arise between plains and removing Indians that would require the intervention of troops who could maneuver quickly. The southwestern border seemed particularly troublesome, for rumors had begun reaching the east about trouble between the plains Indians and the growing number of removed nations in Indian Territory. Even the possibility of such disturbances threatened federal officials’ dreams of orderly, settled communities of removed Indians who were supposed to go west, continue their decline into political and economic insignificance, and then

either assimilate into mainstream American culture or disappear altogether. The continued
presence of powerful and supposedly “uncontacted” (or, in most Americans’ true opinion,
uncontrolled) groups on the plains posed a more real threat to the expansion of the Anglo-
American frontier than Black Hawk’s brief resistance efforts.

Riding the renewed wave of congressional support for Indian removal exemplified by the
Indian Removal Act of 1830, the War Department and the Office of Indian Affairs began trying
to establish an administrative structure on the southwestern frontier to prevent complications
similar to those that had arisen in the 1820s, especially the bloody war between the Osages and
the Western Cherokees and the border troubles between the white settlers of Miller County and
the removing Choctaws. The thousands of Indians who had removed to the region in the 1820s
were a trickle compared to the tens of thousands who would be coming if the treaty negotiations
authorized by the Removal Act were as successful as federal officials hoped. Thus the real and
perceived volatility of the southwestern borderlands remained a primary federal concern.
Continued raids by the Osages on various removed nations were considered a problem, but the
increasing rumors and reports that the Plains Indians were hostile to the presence of the
removing groups led federal officials to believe that they needed to do something to ensure
tranquility in the region. If not, the entire removal project might be impossible to complete. The
Comanches especially were considered a threat, as sensational stories about Comanche hostilities
toward white Texas settlers and the sometimes unwelcoming behavior of Comanches toward

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2 One of the most embarrassing problems had been the accidental overlap of lands in Indian Territory
ceded to both the Creeks emigrating from east of the Mississippi and the western Cherokees, who had
been persuaded to move west out of the claimed boundaries of Arkansas Territory. See a petition sent to
President Jackson by Creek leaders in the west from January 4, 1829, Letters Received by the Office of
Indian Affairs files, Creek Agency West, Roll #236.

Santa Fe traders more often reached federal officials than news about the burgeoning trade network that had been ongoing between American traders since the first decade of the nineteenth century, and would soon grow to include Native migrants from the East as well.

The events surrounding the Black Hawk War in the spring of 1832 had helped refocus Congress on the lands that Indians were supposed to remove to, rather than the lands the U.S. was trying to get Native peoples to remove from. On July 14, 1832 Congress authorized the creation of a three-man commission that was instructed to go to Indian Territory and negotiate peace treaties between the removed groups and the plains Indians so that additional removals could continue taking place without the threat of a war in the West. As Lewis Cass had written in his original instructions, the goal of the commissioners was “to establish a permanent peace among the tribes, indigenous or emigrant, west of the Mississippi.” Cass also emphasized that the federal government viewed the plains nations as the real problem, writing “The fear of hostilities, arise from the habits and dispositions of the Panis [Wichitas], Camanches & their kindred tribes,” although Cass would also admit that the department had very little information about those plains groups in the first place. This commission was one of the most concerted efforts by the federal government in the era prior to the Civil War to exert control over the peoples of Indian Territory. Not only was the commission supposed to create peace between the supposedly war-like plains Indians and the removing nations, the commissioners had also been instructed to come up with a governmental structure under which all the Indians of the region would function as members of a single territory, much like other territories in the Union had been governed before they had been admitted as states. In this way, the federal government treated the removing Indians a lot like white settler colonists who were moving into the West at the same
time. To help accomplish these goals, the commissioners were given several companies of the newly-created dragoons to use for protection or intimidation purposes as they saw fit.\footnote{Lewis Cass to William Carroll, Montfort Stokes, and Robert Vaux, July 14, 1832, Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll #9; Montfort Stokes to Lewis Cass, October 27, 1833, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Western Superintendency, Roll #921.}

Montfort Stokes,\footnote{Depending on the source, his name is sometimes spelled “Montford.” Montfort is used here as the most commonly found spelling. In his own letters, he usually signed his name “M. Stokes.” For biographical information about Stokes, see William Omer Foster, “The Career of Montfort Stokes in North Carolina,” North Carolina Historical Review, Vol. 16 (July 1939) and Foster, “The Career of Montfort Stokes in Oklahoma,” Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. 18 (March 1940).} a grizzled Revolutionary War veteran and close supporter of Andrew Jackson’s policies, was appointed as the head of the commission, and thus the group has been known to most historians as the “Stokes Commission.”\footnote{Contemporary sources usually call it the “Federal Indian Commission” or just the “Commission” or the “Board.” The fact that Stokes served in the position longer than the others has probably contributed to his name being most closely associated with this federal effort.} Nearly seventy years old when he was appointed the head of the commission, Stokes resigned as the governor of North Carolina to take the position on the commissioner. Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, a Yale-educated lawyer from Connecticut and John F. Schermerhorn, a minister from New York, accepted positions as the other two members of the commission after the other original appointees, Felix Robertson, William Carroll, and Robert Vaux all declined for family or health-related reasons.\footnote{See Felix Robertson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Sept. 12, 1832; Ellsworth to Cass, July 27, 1832; John F. Schermerhorn to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Aug. 1832; Resolution of the Senate, July 14, 1832; Resolution of the Senate Dec. 20, 1832 all in: Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Western Superintendency, Roll #921. Although Carroll declined this mission, he would later play an important role in forcing the Cherokee into signing a series of removal treaties in 1835.} When all three commissioners arrived in Indian Territory in December 1832, they were hopeful about their chances for success. However, after only a few months on the job, cracks appeared in the unity of the commission and its members realized that they had been given a nearly impossible task.

Native peoples were arriving in Indian Territory in a steady stream throughout the 1830s,
continually creating new complications with the white settlers who lived in Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas and distracting the commissioners from their real mission.8

At the same time that the Stokes Commission was created, Congress had authorized other commissions that were designed to carry out treaty negotiations with Native groups in Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Missouri. Indian removal was not designed as a policy that would only affect the American South. The U.S. government was attempting to solve the “Indian problem” and complete removal once and for all with a broad new effort to create a comprehensive Indian policy. Some members of Congress advocated creating a northern version of the space known as “Indian Territory” where tribes from that region of the country could be resettled, leaving the wide swath of land in between open to American settlers all the way to the Pacific Ocean. This other “Indian Territory” was never created, likely because no one had been convinced that the plan for the southern Indian Territory would actually work. Scattered Native reservations were instead established on the northern plains, while other Native groups from that region were eventually relocated to Indian Territory later in the nineteenth century.

Three of the six new dragoon companies were deployed to the northwest in the fall of 1832, while the other three were dispatched to the southwest to support the commissioners. Jesse Bean, a member of a prominent Arkansas family and War of 1812 veteran, was appointed captain of one of the southwestern companies.9 Almost immediately after Bean’s company reported for duty at Fort Gibson on September 24, 1832, General Matthew Arbuckle, who was scrambling to

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8 See for example the controversy over the abandonment of Fort Smith in favor of the new location of Fort Gibson that the white citizens of Arkansas pulled members of the commission into. This dispute in particular also says a lot about the power structures that existed in the Old Southwest. Brad Agnew, *Fort Gibson: Terminal on the Trail of Tears* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

9 *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* entry on Jesse Bean; *Arkansas Gazette*, July 18, 1832 (University of Central Oklahoma Microfilm)
get a handle on what he saw as a volatile situation before even more Indians arrived, dispatched
Bean’s company to the west with orders to make contact with the Comanches. What Arbuckle,
the members of the commission, and other federal officials failed to realize as they tried to assert
control was that the lives of most Native people in the southwest had little to do with the federal
government. The United States was acting a minor role in a decades-long effort by Native
societies to remake themselves and achieve new prosperity in new western contexts.10

The mission of Jesse Bean and his company of dragoons quickly became merged with
that of the Stokes Commission. Soon after Bean departed for the West, Henry Ellsworth became
the first commissioner to arrive at Fort Gibson on October 8, 1832. Arbuckle informed Ellsworth
about Bean’s mission and Ellsworth decided that he should join the dragoons, since their mission
so closely aligned with his congressional directions to contact the Plains Indians and initiate
peace negotiations.11 This merged expedition has received a significant amount historical
attention because the famous author Washington Irving accompanied Ellsworth to Indian
Territory and chose to stay with him on this foray into the western prairies. The wider geo-
political significance of this journey and its connection to the implementation of Indian removal,
however, has largely been lost.12

Ellsworth was one of the most polarizing federal appointees to arrive in Indian Territory
in the 1830s. People who met him seemed to either like him or find him completely irritating.

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10 See Elliott West in The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998) for the idea of the re-making of Plains Indians, especially the Cheyenne as the “Called-Out People.”

11 See Ellsworth to Cass, July 27, 1832 and October 9, 1832 in LR-OIA, Western Superintendency, Roll #921.

Count Albert-Alexandre de Pourtales, a young Swiss gentleman who was also accompanying Washington Irving on his journey west, traveled with Ellsworth in Indian Territory for a number of weeks. In his personal reflections about the trip, Pourtales referred sarcastically to Ellsworth as the “Lord Commissioner.” However, Pourtales believed that Ellsworth had nothing but good, if ultimately naive intentions. He wrote that Ellsworth was “one of those good old philanthropists, one of those peaceful and calm Yankee republicans who, devoted to his cause like a prophet of old, imagined that peace would follow immediately and that the Indians would shake hands, would establish Plato’s Atlantis, the living Utopia, and would retrace the era of the Golden Age for corrupt man.” Pourtales also noted that when Ellsworth set out on that first attempt to meet with the plains Indians “he left Fort Gibson full of apostolic ideas and with a gentle, sleepy look about him.” Like others, Pourtales thought very little of Ellsworth’s actual knowledge or potential ability to help the Indians, stating “He had several vague notions about Indians, a great deal of good will, and a desire learn” but did not possess any of the qualities that would make him a competent administrator of Indian affairs, traits that unfortunately were common among federal appointees in the West.

The travelers returned to Fort Gibson on November 10, largely unsuccessful in their brief reconnaissance mission, which took them from the fort in a southwesterly direction, almost as far as present-day Oklahoma City before they turned around. Initially their mission had been to go as far south as the Red River, but they realized only a few weeks into the trip that making it that far so late in the fall season would be dangerous. Food was scarce from the beginning, and many of the dragoons became ill during the trip. According to Ellsworth, the dragoons that had

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departed before him had not even bothered to bring a guide or an interpreter. The travelers did meet a few Cherokees and Osages, two groups whose continued raids on each other had long threatened to undo the federal government’s removal plans, but they never encountered the plains Indians who were the focus of Ellsworth’s and the dragoon’s instructions. The majority of the trip consisted of Ellsworth and the dragoons stumbling around the prairies, hoping to meet the plains Indians by chance.14

The conflicts that had already occurred involving the removed and western Indian nations posed more than just a threat to the federal government’s removal policies. Those conflicts had shown that the possibility of a confederacy of Indian nations, united militarily against the Osages and organized politically in their relationship with the United States was real. The unified political confederacy that the Western Cherokees had tried to build had never quite come to fruition, but they had succeeded where the government had failed at calming some of the

14 Ellsworth kept a diary of the trip that is now housed at Yale’s Beinecke Library. There is also an account of the journey that Ellsworth intended for the public, which was finally published in 1937. See Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, Washington Irving on the Prairie; or A Narrative of a Tour of the Southwest in the Year 1832. Edited by Stanley T. Williams and Barbara D. Simison (New York: American Book Company, 1937). In the introduction, the editors made one of the few attempts by historians to provide context by explaining the reasons for the creation of the commission, but could only optimistically and vaguely conclude that it was “to study the country, to mark the boundaries, to pacify the warring Indians, and, in general, to establish order and justice.” (p. xi)
tensions between the removing tribes by working together against the Osages with some bands of the Shawnees, Kickapoos, Piankeshaws, Delawares and others.15

In Ellsworth’s report to Lewis Cass about the trip, he presented evidence that hopes for a confederacy still existed among the tribes of Indian Territory, writing that he had met at least a few Natives who were interested in the establishment of Indian Territory as an official “territory” of the Union, one that would be designed to eventually become a state and would have a territorial government controlled by the various Indian groups together.16 Ellsworth hoped this was a sign that he and the other commissioners would be able to accomplish the part of their mission that called for the establishment of a unified government in Indian Territory, but it was also a sign that the removed nations in the region were willing to consider how they might use that federal offer for their own purposes. A confederacy of Indian nations, angry at white Americans for forcing them out of their eastern homes, was one of the great fears federal officials had about the Indian removal project. But if the removing Indians could be drawn into deeper alliance with (and reliance on) the United States, they could be allies in the U.S. colonial project. Ellsworth’s report shows that some among the removed groups were at least willing to

15 In The Shawnees and Their Neighbors, 1795–1870, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), Stephen Warren claimed that this anti-Osage coalition eventually evolved into a “multiethnic Indian state.” However, I think that this alliance was much looser than Warren allows. Native people working together to achieve a common goal, especially when that goal involved warfare against another group (in this instance the Osages) federal officials got nervous. I believe this was part of the reason why the commissioners were charged with trying to create a territorial government, to take over control of the situation before a true “Indian confederacy” came into existence, and Warren may have been too influenced by reading sources written by people who were fearful of the situation in the southwest, rather than knowledgeable about it. Indeed, Warren’s main source for many of his statements about this are books by Grant Foreman, which contain very inconsistent citations, many of which are no longer filed in the same locations as when Foreman consulted them in the 1920s and 1930s.

16 Ellsworth to Cass, November 18, 1832, LR-OIA Western Superintendency, Roll #921. These were probably Western Cherokees and Creeks, but could have included Shawnees, Delawares, or Kickapoos.
consider this possibility if it would allow them to maintain land rights and sovereignty in the West.

After Ellsworth’s return, he waited at Fort Gibson for the arrival of Schermerhorn and Stokes. Soon, a party of Seminoles arrived. They had been sent west to explore the lands that the government was trying to get them to accept in exchange for their lands in Florida. Ellsworth and Arbuckle persuaded them to sign a document stating their satisfaction with the lands proposed for exchange, which was contained within the boundaries of the western Creek Nation. The federal government considered the Seminoles to be a renegade band of the Creek Nation who had run away to Florida, and used that belief as a convenient reason to try to consolidate the two nations together in Indian Territory. Federal officials had been worried since the first decade after the Louisiana Purchase that there would not be enough space for the removal of all the eastern Indians, especially because of the increasing demands of white American settlers for land in the West as well. By the 1830s, these fears were coming true. Space was becoming an issue, and it became necessary to try fitting all removing groups into Indian Territory. However, as the commissioners would soon learn, many other groups were choosing to move to Indian Territory and the regions on its borders for their own reasons. The Seminole chiefs who visited Fort Gibson did not understand that they were actually agreeing to be settled on Creek lands, a misunderstanding that later led to significant problems. However, Ellsworth seemed unaware of these contexts, and was just happy that he had accomplished something concrete before the other commissioners even arrived.17

17 ibid. Also note that while some Creeks approved of the idea of consolidation with the Seminole, many did not. Their subsequent treatment of the Seminoles when they arrived in the 1840s indicates a significant amount of resentment about the arrangement.
In December 1832, while the three dragoon companies wintered at Fort Gibson, Ellsworth wrote to Lewis Cass that because he was still the only commissioner who had arrived, there was little progress to report.\(^\text{18}\) It was probably around this time that Ellsworth had a conversation about the Plains Indians with Sam Houston, who had recently moved to the western Cherokee Nation following his resignation as the governor of Tennessee amid scandal.\(^\text{19}\) Ellsworth and Houston had apparently met soon after Ellsworth’s arrival in Indian Territory, and they struck up a friendship. Houston, who was clearly in an exploratory phase of life in 1832, offered his services to Ellsworth, for both men agreed that the Plains Indians, especially the Comanches, posed a threat to federal removal plans. Lacking knowledge about the Comanches’ past relationship with the U.S. government and immersed in frontier rumors about their supposed hostility, Houston departed for the plains sometime late in 1832, searching for the Comanches. After traveling for several months, Houston finally met them in January 1833, far out on the Texas plains. Houston reported his journey to Lewis Cass, but his efforts ultimately accomplished little that aided Ellsworth or the U.S. government.\(^\text{20}\) Houston’s brief involvement is yet another example of the disjointed efforts made by the U.S. government to achieve its Indian policy goals, and how little knowledge of the past most U.S. agents in the West held.

\(^{18}\) *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* entry on the “Ranger” companies; Ellsworth to Cass, December 8, 1832, LR-OIA, Western Superintendency, Roll #921.

\(^{19}\) For more information about Sam Houston’s history with the Cherokee Nation, see Jack Gregory and Rennard Strickland, *Sam Houston with the Cherokees, 1829-1833* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967).

\(^{20}\) See Sam Houston to Lewis Cass, July 30, 1833 in *The Papers of Sam Houston*. Houston accomplished little that would actually help Ellsworth, but this trip to Texas would be especially significant for his own future activities in the region. The majority of the letter is a rant against the incompetent Mexican government. See also Gregory and Strickland, *Sam Houston with the Cherokees, 1829-1833*. 
John F. Schermerhorn and Samuel Stambaugh, who had been appointed the secretary for the commission, finally arrived at Fort Smith on December 19. Montfort Stokes appeared a few days later. The fully assembled commission could finally begin its work. Around the same time, Congress decided to dissolve the dragoons as a special division and reincorporate them as regular military units so that they could be a part of the federal government’s arsenal of tools to deal with the “Indian problem.” These mounted infantry units had yet to prove that they could accomplish anything useful, but federal officials were feeling more than ever their own weakness in the West, especially in comparison to the highly mobile (and thus elusive) Plains Indians. By mid-year, Congress had completed commissioning officers in the First United States Dragoons, with companies to be stationed regularly at Fort Gibson and other Indian Territory military posts.

Meanwhile, Schermerhorn, Stokes, and Ellsworth continued trying to fulfill the mission given to them by Congress. Ellsworth’s initial foray onto the plains to contact the Comanches and other tribes there had been unsuccessful, as were subsequent attempts to send messengers to find them, and so the commissioners remained at Fort Gibson trying to solve the more immediate problem of ongoing disputes caused by the Osages. Two bands of Osages led by Clermont and White Hair still resided in the Three Forks region in violation of past treaty promises to remove

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21 Stambaugh to Cass, December 22, 1832, LR-OIA, Western Superintendency, Roll #921. Stambaugh, a captain in the military, had been stationed at Green Bay when he received notice of his appointment as secretary for the commission. See Stambaugh to Cass, August 26, 1832, ibid. Stokes had accepted his appointment to the commission as early as July 22, but had to resign his position as governor of North Carolina to begin this new position. His resignation was accepted on December 6, 1832, and his replacement, David Lowry Swain, was sworn into office.

22 Andrew Jackson signed the bill that absorbed the special Rangers or dragoons into the U.S. Army as cavalry companies on March 3, 1833 “for the more perfect defense of the frontier. See Pelzer, Marches of the United States Dragoons, p. 13.
to the Osage reservation further north, in Kansas. The Osages were, ironically, the only Indian
group the federal government tried to remove out of Indian Territory rather than into it. These
recalcitrant Osages had villages near Fort Gibson, and so the commissioners rarely lacked the
opportunity to interact with them. In March 1833 the commissioners arranged for a council with
Clermont and White Hair’s bands at Fort Gibson. Colonel Auguste Pierre Chouteau (hereafter A.
P.) was present at the meeting, as was his cousin, Auguste Aristide, who served as a translator. A.
P. and the rest of the Chouteau family had long been recognized by U.S. government officials as
people whose actions and opinions could deeply influence the Osages. The Chouteau family’s
presence at these councils was initially welcomed by the commissioners, but the influence of the
Chouteaus would soon become a point of contention among them.23

The Chouteau family had made their way in the world by being adaptable. A. P. and
Auguste Aristide’s fathers had lived through a volatile era of transition in the trans-Mississippi
West, establishing an immensely profitable fur trading business that operated out of St. Louis just
as French ownership of Louisiana Territory transitioned into Spanish ownership. The Chouteaus
made themselves indispensable to both the Spanish government that took nominal administrative
control over the region and to the Native peoples who needed access to European goods. The
family did the same when the United States government took over administrative control from
Spain after 1803.

However, by the 1830s, the personal and financial interests of the family could not
always be made to align with the plans of the occupying imperial government. Some U.S.

23 Stan Hoig, The Chouteaus: First Family of the Fur Trade (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico
Press, 2008) and Shirley Christian, Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, The French
officials, who had long been suspicious of the family’s true motives, were coming to realize that
the Chouteaus, while useful allies, might be one of the reasons the government continued to have
so many problems with the Osages. Making matters more complicated was the fact that many of
the Chouteau men who participated in trade with the Osages had Osage wives. Such familial
connections for traders were common and expected in the Native world, but for most federal
officials, those connections simply meant that the Chouteaus had divided loyalties. Additionally,
the fur trade, the main Chouteau family business for decades, was beginning a steep decline by
the 1830s. A. P. in particular had suffered a number of serious financial setbacks in the years
leading up to the treaty negotiations at Fort Gibson in March 1833. The treaty proposed by the
commissioners again insisted that the Osages move out of the Three Forks region, but it was
there that A. P. had recently established a series of trading posts frequented by the Osages.24

A. P.’s business interests surely influenced his decision to inform the Osages that he
believed the treaty that the commissioners were trying to get them to sign was not in their best
interest. His personal life was certainly also a factor. A. P. had at least two Osage wives, and
multiple half-Osage children as a result of those relationships.25 However, from a purely
objective point of view, the treaty really was a bad idea for the Osages. They would lose valuable
land if they agreed to remove north to a reservation entirely within the limits of what is now

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25 The personal mixed with business again, as previous Osage treaties had given to those children
allotments of land near the Three Forks posts belonging to Chouteau, and he had been named the guardian
of the children and their lands. Oddly, it is unclear from the available documents whether any of the U.S.
officials involved in the management of those reserves knew that the Osages were Chouteau’s children. It
may have been a case of common knowledge that was taboo to actually speak about.
Kansas, which lacked the same rivers and lush forest areas. They would also be forced to accept changes to the annuities that they had been promised in previous treaties.26

Schermerhorn and Ellsworth were furious that A. P. appeared to be working against them. Stokes, on the other hand, shared many of A. P.’s views about the lack of justice in the treaty, and he agreed to suspend the negotiations until the Osages could have more time to think about their options. Schermerhorn and Ellsworth wrote to Lewis Cass, complaining that they had been unable to conclude a treaty with the Osages because A. P. had undermined them. In response, A. P. wrote to Cass accusing Schermerhorn and Ellsworth of being too harsh by asking the Osages to sign a treaty that was clearly unfair. A. P. praised Stokes for being even-handed in his dealings with the Osages, but called the appointment of Schermerhorn and Ellsworth as commissioners “unfortunate.”27 Stokes defended A. P., writing to Cass that “[h]e possesses more correct information relative to Indians and their affairs, than any person I have met with West of the Mississippi” and claimed that A. P. had been nothing but helpful to the commissioners. The complaints of Schermerhorn and Ellsworth, Stokes wrote, arose “because he [Chouteau] was as unwilling as myself, to have the Osages removed to a poor naked Prairie destitute of timber, and much nearer to their enemies, [t]he Panis, [Pawnees] than they now are.”28


28 Stokes to Cass, July 20, 1833, LR-OIA, Western Superintendency, Roll #921. The fractured nature of Osage political leadership at this time was probably the most important factor in these negotiations.
While others furiously debated their fate on paper, the Osages themselves continued their efforts to survive the crush of Native and white migrations that were pushing their society to the breaking point. Many Osage men responded by continuing their raids to the southwest, although the increasing presence of the removed groups made such raids more difficult. In May 1833, an Osage war party attacked a Kiowa camp on the southern plains near the Red River, a location new to the Kiowas, who had begun moving further south in at the beginning of the nineteenth century after their alliance with the Comanches. The Kiowa warriors had gone out on a hunt, leaving the women, children, and old men in camp. The Osages saw this as an opportunity to score an easy victory on the allies of their long-time rivals, the Comanches, and an unprecedented opportunity for plunder, one of the only activities keeping their economy going. About 150 Kiowas, mostly women and children, were slaughtered, and the Osages returned to the Three Forks region with dozens of valuable horses. This incident alarmed and frustrated the commissioners when garbled rumors about it reached eastern Indian Territory. The Osage raid on the Kiowas would also have important consequences for future U.S. attempts to establish peace between the plains nations and the Osages.

Frustrated with a lack of progress in Indian Territory by the summer of 1833, Ellsworth decided to move on, heading north to Fort Leavenworth, while Stokes and Schermerhorn went to

29 The actual location where to raid took place is unclear, but it was probably on the Red River near what is now the border of Texas and Oklahoma.

30 Monahan, “Trade Goods on the Prairie,” and Mildred P. Mayhall, The Kiowas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 147. Mayhall describes the Kiowa calendar entry for the summer of 1833 when the event occurred. The Kiowas called it the “summer that they cut off their heads,” referring to the Osages gruesome slaughter of the Kiowas, in which they cut off the heads of many of the victims and put them in the copper cooking kettles of the camp. The event was so disruptive to the Kiowas that A’date, the Kiowa chief, was deposed in favor of Dohasan. A photographic history of the Kiowa winter counts was published in 2009. See Candace S. Greene, One Hundred Summers: A Kiowa Calendar Record (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009). See pp. 46-48 for “the summer they cut off their heads.”
St. Louis to take care of financial business related to the commission. At Fort Leavenworth, Ellsworth held a long series of meetings with local Pawnees, Delawares, Kickapoos, Shawnees, Potawatomies, Otoes, Kansas, Ottawas, Peorias, Omahas, Kaskaskias, Weas, Sacs, and Ioways. Ellsworth’s letters to Cass about these meetings demonstrate his pride at what he felt he had achieved in getting these groups together to talk and to sign a treaty in which they agreed to stop fighting amongst themselves and let any disputes that might arise between them be handled through their respective U.S. agents, instead of through the revenge raids that Ellsworth described as “utterly savage.” This peace and friendship agreement might have meant little, but while he was at Fort Leavenworth and the surrounding region, Ellsworth also got the Pawnees to sign a land cession treaty. This was not something that he was strictly authorized to do, but it was an event that may have had important consequences later.

However, most other federal officials were not impressed with Ellsworth’s efforts, including Cass and Stokes. Cass was mainly concerned that no funds had been appropriated for Ellsworth’s meetings at Fort Leavenworth, nor had any provisions been made that would supply the Indians with goods or annuities that would help to make the peace and friendship treaty binding. Cass had enough experience with Indian affairs to know that mere promises of peace could mean quite little on the frontier. Promises needed to be backed up with actions, trade

31 Ellsworth to Cass, August 4, 1833; August 8, 1833; August 19, 1833; November 6, 1833; November 13, 1833; November 14, 1833 and Appendix to that letter all in LR-OIA, Western Superintendency, Roll #921.

32 The first treaties between the four major Pawnee bands and the U.S. government had been signed in June 1818. This was followed by a joint treaty of all four bands in which the Pawnees supposedly agreed that because “they reside within the territorial limits of the United States” the Pawnees “acknowledge their [U.S.] supremacy, and claim their protection.” See Kappler, ed., Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, “Treaty with the Pawnee Tribe, September 30, 1825,” pp. 258-60. In Ellsworth’s October 9, 1833 treaty, he claimed that the Pawnees had agreed to cede “all the land lying south of the Platte river.” See Kappler, ed., pp. 416-18.
goods, and presents. Stokes expressed similar concerns about Ellsworth’s apparently unilateral actions, telling Cass, “You know, Sir, that there can be no permanently satisfactory negotiations with the Indians of the West without the reconciling aid of presents.”\textsuperscript{33} Moreover, Ellsworth’s meetings had been with Indian groups who already had treaties with the United States, even though his priority was supposed to be contacting the plains nations, which Cass and other federal officials in the 1830s believed had never made contact with the U.S. government. Ellsworth’s letters to Cass indicate that he had hoped that his meetings with the tribes near Fort Leavenworth would help him establish connections with the plains Indians. Stokes mocked those hopes, writing that Ellsworth “might as well attempt to collect last years clouds, as to collect the [Wichitas] and Camanches at this time, and under present circumstances.”\textsuperscript{34}

As summer turned to fall, Ellsworth stayed near Fort Leavenworth, Schermerhorn’s whereabouts were unknown, and Stokes remained stuck in St. Louis because of his poor health. Stokes’s time in St. Louis was not wasted, however, because he was able to explore the offices of William Clark, who was still serving as the regional superintendent of Indian affairs. Stokes marveled that the clerks in Clark’s office kept such precise records and maps, which were constantly being updated as new information arrived about the landscapes and the Native peoples of the trans-Mississippi West. By the time he returned to Fort Gibson, probably in December

\textsuperscript{33} Stokes to Cass, August 15, 1833, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.

\textsuperscript{34} Stokes to Cass, October 27, 1833, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
1833, Stokes’s perusal of these records had made him one of the most informed people in the U.S. about the Indian nations of the West.\(^\text{35}\)

When Ellsworth returned to Fort Gibson in December 1833, he brought a delegation of Pawnees, Omahas, and others along with him. These bands had been part of the “good will” treaty council Ellsworth had held at Fort Leavenworth. He hoped to capitalize on that good will by bringing some of the Indians involved to Fort Gibson, believing that their presence would somehow entice the Osages to sign another version of the previous spring’s treaty when negotiations resumed. He also hoped the presence of these groups might entice the plains Natives to come in for a council with the commissioners. However, Stokes reported his “great embarrassment” that Ellsworth had initiated this diplomatic meeting without obtaining any of the necessary provisions or gifts that the Indians would expect to be provided for them. Desperate to satisfy at least some of the Pawnee and Otoe requests for horses for their return journey, Stokes gave them the horses that had been purchased for the use of the commissioners because he had no other funds available to buy more and did not want to offend his Native guests.\(^\text{36}\)

Despite these issues, treaty talks with the Osages continued, and a document was actually signed between Ellsworth’s guests and the local Osage bands. Both A. P. and his brother Pierre Ligeust (or P. L., as he will be referred to hereafter) signed the peace treaty as witnesses.\(^\text{37}\)

Ellsworth seems to have felt that he had achieved success in paving the way for a more definitive

\(^{35}\) ibid. Stokes also wrote three long letters to Cass in the summer of 1833, where he tried to impart some of the knowledge about the western Indians that he had learned while perusing the files in Clark’s office. See Stokes to Cass, July 20, 1833; Stokes to Cass, August 5, 1833; and Stokes to Cass, August 15, 1833, all in LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.

\(^{36}\) Stokes to Cass, December 17, 1833, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.

\(^{37}\) Despite all the efforts related to this treaty with the Osages, it was never ratified by the Senate. For the Chouteau brothers’ involvement, see Hoig, \textit{The Chouteaus}, pp. 124-26.
treaty with the Osages, for the document that was signed only pledged the Osages to be at peace with the other Indians who had been present. Stokes and Cass were again unimpressed with Ellsworth’s efforts, because no progress had been made toward actually getting the Osages to go live on their reservation or on the commission’s main job, which was to contact the plains nations and sign peace treaties that would guarantee that removal could continue unabated.

A. P.’s opinion of Ellsworth had not changed when negotiations with the Osages were underway again in March 1834. A. P. wrote to Cass, holding few of his opinions back and stating that the commissioners “condescended so far as to request me to be the bearer of certain terms and conditions of a Treaty proposed by them to the Osages,” indicating he knew the level of his influence among the Osage, and so did others. Making himself the martyr in the situation, A. P. told Cass that initially he wanted to “have nothing to do with the Commissioners... [because of] what had passed between them and myself last year on the same subject.” However, after reflecting on his “duty to serve the Government,” A. P. had changed his mind and agreed to be the bearer of the commissioners’ proposals to Clermont’s village. Concerned about the “suspicious disposition” that the commissioners harbored against him, (even as they ironically entrusted him with an important mission) A. P. made sure to bring an officer from Fort Gibson with him to attest to the honest nature of his presentation of the treaty proposal.38

But A. P. still had no good words to say about Ellsworth and Schermerhorn. He told Cass that the Osages had “full confidence in the Government” but that they did not trust Ellsworth and Schermerhorn at all. A. P. thought that Montfort Stokes alone stood a better chance of actually signing a treaty with the Osages. He also believed that Samuel Stambaugh, the commissioners’

38 A.P. Chouteau to Lewis Cass, March 3, 1834, Senate Executive Document #512.
secretary, who sided with Stokes on most matters but had no actual authority to act, would make a better commissioner than either Ellsworth or Schermerhorn. A. P. concluded his letter to Cass with a subtle threat that he would no longer use his influence with the Indians for the U.S. government as long as Ellsworth and Schermerhorn remained members of the commission.39

Schermerhorn and Ellsworth probably knew their time on the commission was limited. In addition to A. P.’s concerns about their actions as commissioners, word had begun circulating around the Fort Gibson rumor mill that both men had engaged in “speculation” in local lands, misusing public funds in the process. Both of these accusations were typical of many made against federal agents and commissioners in the West, but Matthew Arbuckle began an official investigation and found enough evidence to declare to officials in Washington that the “public interest requires that the Commissioners as now organized should not be continued in Employ beyond the expiration of the Law, under which they now act.”40 Ellsworth, who went on leave back east in the spring of 1834, strenuously defended his actions as a commissioner to multiple authorities in Washington. Schermerhorn did the same from Fort Gibson, where he remained in residence through the spring of 1834. In addition to defending his own actions, Schermerhorn accused Stambaugh of wrongdoing instead, but it appears that none of Schermerhorn’s accusations were taken seriously.41

Ellsworth wrote almost as many letters in the spring of 1834 defending himself as he had written regarding the actual business of the commission. Schermerhorn wrote substantially more

39 ibid.
40 Stokes to Arbuckle, quoting a previous letter of Arbuckle to Washington in the opening pages, May 8, 1834, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
41 See especially Schermerhorn to Elbert Herring, May 19, 1834, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
letters defending himself and accusing others than he ever did which reported back to Washington about his work as a commissioner. The actions of Ellsworth and Schermerhorn are illustrative of many other U.S. representatives on the Indian frontier from this period. Whether or not either of them participated in land speculation or misused public funds is beside the point, nor is there any way to definitively prove their innocence or guilt. If they did participate in speculation, it likely took away from their attention to their jobs as Indian commissioners.42

But what absolutely took up much of their time was all the correspondence and other proofs that were assembled in relation to the accusations. Hundreds of pages of documents fill the records of the Office of Indian Affairs with the details of Schermerhorn’s and Ellsworth’s supposed misdeeds, none of which had much to do with Indian affairs at all.43 Others before them, like western Cherokee agent Edward DuVal, had done substantially the same thing, as would DuVal’s son Marcellus, who was the Seminole agent in the 1840s. The men involved in trying to solve the “Indian problem” very often became entangled in these sorts of affairs, leaving them and the others around them with substantially less time to focus on the jobs they had been sent West to do. In some respects, this might have been a good thing for Native groups, who resented the meddling of men like Schermerhorn and Ellsworth. However, it also prevented

42 At the very least, it seems that some of the members of the commission did seriously overspend. Before the rumors about misuse of public funds began to fly, Ellsworth had written back to Washington on January 11, 1834, noting that the $20,000 that had originally be appropriated for all expenses relating to the commission had been spent, along with an additional $9,000 that he requested the government to pay. Additional funds would also be needed if the commission was to complete it’s work. Tellingly, this letter was dictated by Ellsworth to his son Edward, whom he hired out, without apparent permission as a secretary for himself (and possibly other members of the commission) from July 11, 1833 to January 30, 1834. This move on Ellsworth’s part might explain some of the animosity between himself and Samuel Stambaugh, who had been hired as the official secretary of the commission. See Ellsworth to Cass, Jan. 11, 1834, LR-OIA Western Sup., Roll #921. Other accounts of monies spent by the commission submitted by Samuel Stambaugh begin at image 715 on the same Western Superintendency microfilm reel.

43 Arbuckle to Colonel Roger Jones, May 4, 1834, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
those with greater understanding of the situation, like Stokes and Arbuckle, from brokering peace agreements that might have actually helped the Native people of Indian Territory and the southwestern borderlands.

In June 1834, the authority given to the commissioners to act as agents of the federal government was allowed to expire, despite protests from Ellsworth and Schermerhorn that this would substantially set back the government’s plans for removal and the creation of peace treaties with the plains Indians. This expiration was obviously allowed to occur to remove Ellsworth and Schermerhorn from their duties in the easiest way possible. Almost immediately after the commission’s authority expired, Stokes, who had remained in Indian Territory during all the hubbub, was re-appointed as a commissioner, along with new members Matthew Arbuckle and Francis W. Armstrong, who had been involved in organizing parties of Choctaws who were removing to Indian Territory and was recently appointed the Superintendent for Indian Affairs in the Southwest.

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The continuing removals of more Native people into Indian Territory in the early 1830s spurred those who had already migrated to try establishing better political and economic ties with the Comanches and other plains groups. For many, making these connections with indigenous western groups was critical to maintaining sovereignty in the face of encroachment from the U.S. government and in case the large groups of their nations that remained east were finally forced to remove west. Maintaining political and economic relevance was of particular concern to western Creeks and Cherokees, most of whom had come west amid severe disagreements and turmoil with those who chose to remain east of the Mississippi.
In the spring of 1834, the western Creeks and Cherokees sent a joint delegation to Washington that included Roley and Chilly McIntosh representing the Creeks, and Moses Smith, Little King, John Rogers, James Rogers, and probably John Jolly representing the Cherokees. Unimpressed with the work of the commissioners, this joint delegation was tasked with requesting Secretary of War Lewis Cass to instead entrust the removed Indians with the mission of contacting and pacifying the plains nations. The Creeks, Cherokees, and others, the delegation claimed, would be able to establish an “intercourse with the numerous tribes of Indians to the west” because they would do so through trade as well as diplomacy.⁴⁴ Their request was preserved in the form of a written petition. It was an extraordinary document, full of bold requests by Creek and Cherokee leaders for political and economic power. First in these leaders’ minds was the pending emigration of other members of their nations who still remained in the east. It is hardly possible to look at this document and not see the leaders of the bands that had long been in the West trying to solidify their positions of authority. But the petition was also about seizing an important economic opportunity that the western removed groups wanted to capitalize on: tapping into the plains trade networks that would funnel valuable skins, horses, and mules into and through their nations.

The growing removal crisis in the east gave these western leaders the perfect reason to put forth their proposal to the U.S. government in a way that would serve multiple ends. To begin, the Creeks and Cherokees said that they would need points of access to the plains to be established deeper in the interior of Indian Territory. Thus they requested that “three Military Posts” be established along the Red, Washita, and Arkansas rivers. These military posts would

⁴⁴ Petition to Lewis Cass from Creek and Cherokee delegation, May 14, 1834, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Creek Agency, West, Roll. #236.
serve as supply points for Cherokee and Creek traders who would go west to meet the plains Indians. However, the members of the delegation framed their request for these military posts almost entirely as they would relate to removal. They wrote that if these posts were constructed “our settlements, could be extended along the margins of the Rivers, and there the means provided for the support of our brethren of the east who are expected to emigrate at an early day to our new home.”

Thus they appealed federal officials’ ever-increasing desire to get Native people out of the American South, declaring that additional forts in Indian Territory would make the region even more suitable for removal. Additionally, the Creek and Cherokee leaders implied that these forts would contribute to the U.S. government’s goal of obtaining some level of control over the Plains Indians, stating that if the requested forts were constructed, “we shall be able to . . . bring them, [the plains Indians] through their wants, within the control of our institutions.” Thus the removed Indians could show the plains groups the benefits of friendship with the United States, and the U.S. government would not have to continue the simple, yet increasingly difficult, task of finding the plains Indians in the first place. The Creek and Cherokee leaders hoped this prospect would seem appealing because it aligned with most federal officials’ belief that removal would lead to “civilization,” assimilation, and thus the “preservation” of Indian peoples.

During their previous conflicts with the Osages, the Cherokees had carefully cultivated their image with the federal government, doing everything they could to convince U.S. officials that they were much more “civilized” than their “savage” Osage neighbors. The Creeks had also realized the benefits of this strategy. Other historians, most notably David LaVere, have taken

45 ibid; The Cherokee leaders signed off on this language, despite the fact that many of the eastern Cherokees were still desperately fighting against the signing of a removal treaty.
evidence like this petition to paint a picture that depicts the plains and removed Indians as “contrary neighbors,” with the removed Indians looking disdainfully at the plains Indians.46 Some Creeks and Cherokees undoubtedly had this perspective. However, it was certainly not universal among those two groups, or the other removed nations of Indian Territory, and LaVere ignored the fact that other contexts and concerns also motivated the Creeks and Cherokees to make this petition. The impending removal of the rest of their people, in addition to their desires to maintain political and economic sovereignty, cannot be forgotten. Additionally, these removed leaders had to be aware that if the federal government was not directly involved in their endeavors, the rumors about the removed groups’ apparent collusion would run utterly wild, perhaps leading the federal government to interfere in an undesirable way. These goals and considerations were equally, if not more, influential than any feelings of cultural superiority over the plains groups.47

However, to make these overtures to the plains groups, the removed tribes emphasized that they would need the financial support of the United States government. The money and goods that they received per treaty provisions had up to that point been necessary for their own survival in the West. Little could be spared to serve as the presents that the Creeks and Cherokees knew would be necessary to begin establishing goodwill relationships with westerners, especially the Comanches. This and other related documents make it clear that the Comanches were not a problem the western removed tribes sought protection from, despite their


47 For the Cherokees’ efforts to cultivate their image in contrast to the Osages, see DuVal, *The Native Ground*, pp. 215-26, especially p. 217: “Cherokee chiefs adopted the rhetorical dichotomy of ‘savagery’ and ‘civilization’ and portrayed the Cherokee people as a civilized people in an uncivilized place, thereby laying claim to the Arkansas Valley as their native ground.”
request for forts, which were a necessary part of the economic equation. A relationship with the
Comanches was a gateway to valuable commercial opportunities. The Comanches could pose a
threat to the livelihoods of the removed tribes, but establishing a working trade relationship was
the easiest, and most mutually beneficial way to eliminate that threat. The delegation’s leaders
continued their missive to Cass by noting

The subject of opening... friendly intercourse [with] those people, is one [that] has
occupied much of our most earnest attention. Situated, however, as we are, poor,
and our establishments in the Country but just forming, we cannot anticipate any
favorable visits from our exertions but through the aid of the United States. We
are, accordingly, instructed to solicit of them [the U.S. government] the
appropriation of a few thousand dollars to purchase suitable presents for
distribution among the wild
Indians we propose to visit in grand deputations from each of the tribes lying
immediately west of the Arkansas and the state of Missouri.

This section of the petition is key, because it demonstrates that this was not just an economic
mission disguised as a way to help the federal government achieve its removal policy goals. The
Creek and Cherokee leaders wanted the presents to be distributed by “grand deputations” from
all of the removed tribes in Indian Territory, which would indicate the importance that they
placed on establishing firm political ties with the Comanches. It also shows that these western
leaders saw value in creating mutual goals and friendships for all the removed nations to share,
much as the Cherokees had briefly done when they fought their war against the Osages.

The deputations of the removed nations sent west to meet the plains Indians were to be
grand affairs, with the members all “united into one body, consisting of from one thousand to
fifteen hundred men.” The Creek and Cherokee leaders described in detail the locations they
desired to visit: “It is proposed to proceed to . . . cross over to the waters of the Arkansas &
Platte, and return by the way of the Pawnee villages,\textsuperscript{48} & to visit, that [by] that circuit, every Tribe from whom acts of hostility may be apprehended."\textsuperscript{49} By going in that direction, they would be traveling directly through the country where the Comanche trade fairs with northern groups like the Cheyennes were dominating commerce on the plains. Their knowledge of these important locations indicates that many Creeks and Cherokees were already participating in this trade on a personal basis. Finally, the delegation requested that an agent of the U.S. government accompany the party on their journey, so that they could be “advised.” They certainly did not need the advice of another uninformed Indian agent, but they knew the presence of U.S. officials would be the price of receiving funds to secure the goods and presents that would make a successful diplomatic relationship with the Comanches and others possible.\textsuperscript{50}

Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the Creek and Cherokee delegation ever received the requested allocation of goods or official authorization for their grand deputations. But this did not mean that the Creeks, Cherokees, and other removed nations ceased their attempts to establish trade ties with the plains Indians. These western Native leaders were taking matters into their own hands, even as the U.S. government was literally trying to do the same thing by

\textsuperscript{48} They were probably referring to the Wichita villages on the Red River, thus making their route an actual circuit if they started off going north to cross the Arkansas and the Platte rivers, before returning to the south to come across the Wichita villages.

\textsuperscript{49} ibid; see also Hamalainen, Comanche Empire, p. 164 for a description of the Comanche trade fairs and their location on the upper Arkansas River, south and west of the Pawnee villages near the Platte.

\textsuperscript{50} Referring to these items as “presents” is somewhat misleading, even though that it what the Creek and Cherokees leaders themselves called them. They were diplomatic gifts that established the willingness of one group (in this case the removed tribes) to be generous to their potential friends and allies (the Comanches, Kiowas, Pawnees, etc.). Generosity and the ability to distribute items of value gave a person a position of respect and authority in western Plains societies. Such a redistributive ethos could also be found among the nations east of the Mississippi, although perhaps to a lesser degree by the 1830s after decades of exposure to American commercial markets and practices. See Brian Delay, War of a Thousand Deserts, pp. 64-80 and Thomas W. Kavanaugh, Comanche Ethnography: Field Notes of E. Adamson Hoebel, Waldo R. Wedel, Gustav G. Carlson, and Robert H. Lowie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).
sending military expeditions and commissioners into the West to over-awe and intimidate, which were certainly less practical ideas than the Native one of sending trade delegations to create friendly feelings.51

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As the membership of the commission was being shaken up in the summer of 1834, federal efforts to contact and bring the plains Indians under U.S. control continued. Indian Territory was quickly filling up with tribes arriving from the east. It was looking so crowded, in fact, that Creeks who were facing forced removal began exploring the possibility of purchasing lands in Texas instead of Indian Territory. Additionally, the eastern Cherokees’ fight against removal from Georgia was becoming a national political issue and the Seminoles’ armed resistance to removal from Florida continued to intensify, making the mission begun by the commissioners nearly two years before even more urgent. The credibility of the U.S. government’s position that removal was ultimately the best and most compassionate thing to do for Indian tribes was at stake. Could the government, as promised, give “protection and security to the Emigrating tribes?”52

Montfort Stokes had been adamant in his letters from the previous summer that the U.S. needed to be in control of the situation in Indian Territory if they had any hope of completing...

51 See especially James Logan to Sam Houston, June 1, 1842, in Dorman H. Winfrey and James M. Day, eds., The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest 1825–1916, Vol. 2, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association), pp. 135-36. This was not the first or last attempt of Native groups to do this. The McIntosh brothers in particular had a long history of trying to take matters regarding removal into their own hands. See letter from Western Creek Agent Campbell to Lewis Cass, August 22, 1832, reporting that the western Creeks had elected to send Chilly McIntosh and Benjamin Hawkins back east to "settle and arrange all their differences and difficulties" with the other members of the Creek Nation still living east of the Mississippi.” LR-OIA, Creek Agency West, Roll #236.

52 Stokes to Cass, August 15, 1833, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
removal from the east while also maintaining control over the removed Indians, which was arguably just as important as removal itself. But unlike most U.S. government agents, Stokes was incredibly realistic about the limits of the United States’ ability to even begin gaining such control over the plains groups. “The Camanches and Pawnees are the Arabs of the Prairies,” Stokes had mused, “living sometimes in the United States and sometimes in Texas. To threaten these people with war: They would laugh at it—Where can you find them? They regularly follow the herds of Buffalos.” Like the Creeks and Cherokees, Stokes believed that regular trade and presents would be a good first step toward establishing friendly relationships and might give the United States sway over the plains Indians’ actions, but even then, he questioned how the government could actually induce them give up the raiding and plundering that were the basis of their lifestyles.\footnote{ibid.}

No one had answers to these questions, but since the civilian-led efforts of the late commissioners had failed, the military seemed like the next best option. In the spring of 1834, General Henry Leavenworth was appointed as the new head of the army’s western division, and he began preparing to take a battalion of mounted infantry into the west to once again seek out the plains Indians. Maybe this time a dragoon detachment would be able to find them. However, on May 24, just weeks before the expedition was to depart from Fort Gibson, Leavenworth received word from Samuel Stambaugh, who was then ending his term as secretary for the commissioners, about a planned Indian council in Texas. Stambaugh had received the information from Benjamin Hawkins, a Creek man who had emigrated to Indian Territory with the McIntosh party in the 1820s. Hawkins “was one of the wealthiest and most influential men of
the McIntosh party” but because of “some misunderstanding with the Chiefs last fall, he
removed his family to Texas.”

Hawkins had previously served as a U.S. interpreter for the Creeks, and in contacting
Stambaugh seems to have been attempting to set himself up as a broker between the plains tribes
and the U.S. government. He told Stambaugh that he had settled among the various
“Cherokees, Creeks, Delawares & Shawnees inhabiting that region of the Country” and had
become aware “that the Camanchees were [eager] to enter into amicable arrangements with the
United States and would be glad to make any agreement with [the] Government that would tend
to the establishment of Trading houses in the vicinity of their hunting grounds.”

According to Hawkins, the meeting of removed groups scattered throughout Texas and the plains groups was
to take place at an Ioni [Iscani? Wichita?] village on the Trinity River on June 20. Having lived
in the west for nearly a decade, Hawkins would have been well aware of the plains Indians’
desire for guns and other manufactured goods and realized that if he could get the United States
to finally establish good relationships with and trading posts among the Plains Indians, fantastic
economic opportunities would be created for himself and the other western Natives, both north
and south of the Red River.

Stambaugh thought Hawkins’s information would give the commissioners a final
opportunity to complete the most important part of the instructions they had received, to hold “a

54 Stambaugh to Leavenworth, May 24, 1834, LR-OIA West. Sup., Roll #921

55 See Matthew Arbuckle to the Secretary of War, July 29, 1829, LR-OIA, Creek Agency West, Roll #236

56 Stambaugh to Hawkins, May 24, 1834, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.

57 Note that at this very same time a delegation of Creeks and Cherokees was in Washington trying to
lobby the federal government to set them up with trade goods so that they could send a diplomatic
expedition to the west to meet with the Plains tribes. Maybe Hawkins, who had apparently fallen out with
Creek leadership and Chilly McIntosh, was trying to scoop the potential competition?
friendly meeting with the Pawnees & Camanches.” In a desperate letter he wrote to Lewis Cass on the subject, Stambaugh stated that of all the projects the commissioners had been charged with, he believed that none was “of more importance to the welfare & prosperity of the Indians, or the Complete Success of your plan for their future organization & protection in their own Country” west of the Mississippi than a peace treaty with the Comanches. The commissioners had attempted “project after project . . . but nothing had been carried into execution” during the entire two year duration of their authority.

Stambaugh’s many letters on the subject indicate he did everything in his power to convince Leavenworth, Stokes, and Cass to send U.S. representatives to the meeting. He even offered to go by himself in the capacity of a “private citizen.” In the end, however, no one chose to act upon this information. One obvious road block was the fact that Texas still belonged to Mexico in 1834, and federal officials felt uncomfortable meeting with Indians while in a foreign nation and did not want to be accused of meddling in Mexico’s Indian affairs. Stokes and Schermerhorn, both still at Fort Gibson in May 1834, dismissed the idea outright, and Leavenworth also seems to have been uninterested in the idea. He wanted to take his 500 dragoons out to the plains to impress the Indians with the military prowess of the United States, not rush to attend a meeting he had no part in planning. Like many other federal officials in the nineteenth century, Leavenworth believed that Indians only needed to see the military capabilities of the United States, or travel to the East and see the densely populated cities on the

58 Stambaugh to Cass, May 27, 1834, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921

59 ibid.
coast, to disabuse themselves of the idea that they had any power at all relative to the United States.

Thus on June 21, 1834, Leavenworth departed Fort Gibson with 500 U.S. troops, as well as about thirty Native people who were employed as guides, interpreters, and hunters from the Osage, Cherokee, Delaware, and Seneca nations. The famous American artist, George Catlin, was also part of the group. His paintings and descriptions of the plains peoples he met in the southwest are both beautiful and useful, but Catlin’s writings about the expedition also provide insights into the plains Indians’ political and economic goals relative to the removed Indians and the Americans that are invaluable. There are two additional accounts of the 1834 expedition. Hugh Evans, a sergeant in Company C of the U.S. Dragoons recorded the trip in a journal. As the aide-de-camp to Colonel Henry Dodge, the second-in-command on the journey, Evans was always close to the action. The other account comes from a Lieutenant T. B. Wheelock, who also went on the expedition and later wrote an account of the trip that was published as part of Andrew Jackson’s annual message to Congress in 1835.

Catlin had spent years traveling in the west and recording images and text about his life among the Native peoples of the North American interior. He had spent most of 1833 traversing

Wheelock gives more specifics than either Evans or Catlin. He says there were eleven Osage, eight Cherokees, six Delawares, and seven Senecas. De-math-de-ago, Dutch, George Bullet, and Beatte were the leaders of the groups. (p. 74)

These accounts match each other well, although they differ from Catlin’s letters about the expedition in some important points. Catlin had a much deeper understanding of how Native peoples in the West lived, and thus one wants to give greater credence to some of his observations. However, because Evans and Wheelock were so close to the command and actually present at councils which Catlin only heard about, it makes more sense to side with the timeline and events found in Evans and Wheelock the majority of the time. Their accounts were not without error, however, as modern investigations that draw comparisons from other outside sources have found some inconsistencies, especially in regards to dates and some locations. Wheelock’s account is probably the most complete, with the most dates, names, and places, but because he wrote it (after the fact? probably from notes) as an official report, it is less colorful in its details than those of the other two men.
the Missouri River region, and after a brief return to the east coast, received personal permission
from Lewis Cass to accompany the dragoon expedition planned for the summer of 1834.\footnote{See George Catlin, \textit{Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and conditions of the North American Indians; written during eight years' travel (1832-1839) amongst the wildest tribes of Indians in North America}, Volume 2, Letter No. 37, 36-37. (reprinted edition, New York: Dover Publications, 1973). Catlin’s account of the expedition was compared to memories obtained by early twentieth century historian W. S. Nye from Hugh L. Scott, who commanded at Fort Sill in the 1890s, and local Comanche elders. Nye was surprised to find that the memories of the living matched Catlin’s account quite closely. See W.S. Nye, \textit{Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), pp. xvii-xviii; and Nye, Correspondence Notebook No. 25, Nye Collection, Fort Sill Museum, Lawton, Oklahoma.} Catlin wrote, “The \textit{natives} are again ‘to be astonished,’” confirming that part of the federal
government’s plan was indeed to try to over-awe the Indians with U.S. military might. Upon his
arrival at Fort Gibson, Catlin learned that the military had recently received information that the
“number and importance” of the Wichitas and the Comanches “have been greatly over-rated. The
Pawnee Picts [Wichitas]\footnote{Catlin actually meant the Wichita peoples. His notes and letters, plus the writings of other people involved in the expedition often refer to the “Pawnee Picts” as one of the tribes that the military sought to make contact with, but this misunderstanding of their name stemmed from long American confusion about the tribe, who used to live in what is now northern Oklahoma and were called the “Pawnee Picts” by early French explorers. From the descriptions in Catlin and others, however, it is quite clear that the people they are describing are Wichitas.} have been reduced to about one thousand souls,” while the “different bands under various names, generally received as Camanchees have by some been estimated as high as 20,000 souls, which is probably too high.” Instead, the “gentleman residing south of Red river” who provided this information to the government believed the Comanches only consisted of about 3,000 people.\footnote{Stambaugh to Cass, February 4, 1834, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.} The idea of “astonishing” the plains Indians would be infinitely more feasible if their population was so small. Why should the government meet the Comanches nearer their own territory in Texas if they were merely a ragged band of 3,000 nomads?

Leavenworth’s choice to continue with the expedition seemed affirmed by this new information.
The number 20,000 was probably a low population estimate for the Comanches in the 1830s. In reality, it was certainly at least 30,000, and possibly even 40,000. Catlin had no way to accurately judge the size of the Comanche population, but he recognized that a plan of “astonishment” had little chance of succeeding. Unlike many other Americans in the West, Catlin recognized that the “frequent blows on our frontiers” by the Plains Indians that were always rumored to be occurring were probably the result of American expansion, not inherent Indian aggression. For such actions that they might have committed, Catlin believed “I cannot so much blame them, for the Spaniards are gradually advancing upon them on one side, and the Americans on the other, and fast destroying the furs and game of their country, which God gave them as their only wealth and means of subsistence.”

Catlin suspected that the presence of even 500 troops on the plains would do little to over-awe the Indians, but what he and most U.S. officials failed to realize was that the Comanches were eager for a relationship with the United States. In 1834, that desire was fueled by a desire for trade to help their growing economic empire. A few years later, that reason would evolve and become much more urgent, leading the Comanches to seek out U.S. representatives, rather than waiting for the Americans to come to them. However, throughout the 1830s the Comanches remembered the relationship that they had developed with John Sibley a few decades before, and they welcomed a possible return to the days when trade caravans loaded with presents from the U.S. government were traveling up the Red River to the Wichita villages. Unfortunately, both Leavenworth, Catlin, and most U.S. officials were ignorant of past American relationships with the Comanches.

65 Catlin, Notes and Letters, Letter No. 37, p. 38.
Thus in ignorance the dragoon expedition departed in June 1834. After traveling about two hundred miles in almost two weeks and meeting neither the Wichitas nor the Comanches, morale began to dip among members of the expedition. On June 26 or 27 (the accounts differ on the exact day), the expedition met up with a party of five or six hundred Osage hunters of Black Dog’s band, camped near the Canadian River to cure the meat that the U.S. government had hired them to hunt to supply the dragoons. The Osages had had a successful hunt, but they could provide no reliable information about the location of the Comanches. After the recent renewed efforts by the federal government to get them to leave the Three Forks region, Black Dog’s band in particular seems to have developed an even more accommodationist strategy. They hoped to curry the favor of the U.S. government through cooperation; supplying the expedition with buffalo meat was just one way that they could do so. Sending representatives on the dragoon expedition was another part of this strategy. Most of the Osage bands were probably still hostile toward the Comanches, but by this time it seems that at least Black Dog’s band had been engaged in initial peace overtures with the Comanches. By mid-1834, the Comanches also had compelling reasons to call for a truce in the brutal fight that had lasted more than a century.

Earlier in the nineteenth century, the Comanches had developed important northern trade connections through their alliance with the Kiowas, who served as intermediaries to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on the Missouri River, which were the major source of British trade goods (especially guns) on the plains at the time. The Cheyennes, who at the time were in the process

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66 Evans’ report seems to indicate that Beatte was in charge of the hunting party, and does not mention the Osage as being of Black Dog’s band. Wheelock reported that Beatte (a Frenchman whom may or may not have been of partial Osage descent) left with the main company from Fort Gibson. Evans indicates that the party had been sent on ahead to hunt for the provision of the dragoons. Something in between is probably true.
of becoming a plains horse-culture people themselves successfully, and peacefully, integrated themselves into this massive trade network. Additionally, there is some evidence that around the same time, the Comanches had established peace with at least some of the Pawnee bands who resided in what is now Nebraska. A Pawnee/Comanche peace pact may have increased Pawnee raids on the Osages.\textsuperscript{67}

However, by the late 1820s, the peaceful coexistence between the Comanches and their northern plains trading partners had begun to end. According to Hamalainen, as disease and Lakota raids took a toll on the Mandan and Hidatsa villages, the profits that could be make through trade diminished, and the Cheyennes and their Arapaho allies began looking for new economic opportunities and better access to the buffalo herds that had become necessary for their plains lifestyles. Thus the Cheyennes and Arapahos pushed south of the Arkansas River, right into the heart of Comancheria, a move was in part made possible by the Cheyennes’ alliance with William and Charles Bent, American brothers who had established a vastly important trading post on the upper Arkansas River. The Bents had traveled to the Rocky Mountains as fur trappers and traders, but soon realized that more profits could be made by tapping into the plains trade networks and became the premier gun dealers to the northern plains groups. Because the majority of these developments occurred hundreds of miles from U.S. agents, their exact timeline is not completely clear, but by the summer of 1834 these events were already beginning to

\textsuperscript{67} James, \textit{Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans}, pp. 65-78. Hamalainen, \textit{Comanche Empire}, pp. 48-49.
influence the Comanches and Osages political actions, especially in relation to the United States.⁶⁸

Thus the Comanches looked with eagerness toward the east, hoping to reestablish profitable trade connections with Americans and make new connections with the removing Indians. Perhaps even more importantly, the Comanches hoped that if they could reestablish connections to the United States like those that they had enjoyed during Sibley’s tenure as Indian agent in the southwest, the Americans could serve as useful intermediaries in the conflict with the expansionist Cheyennes and Arapahos. The Wichitas, who had become diplomatically marginalized in the Comanche empire without access to a reliable source of trade goods, also looked eagerly for connections with Americans and removed groups.⁶⁹

All of this context completely escaped Leavenworth, Arbuckle, Stokes, and other federal officials who had planned the 1834 expedition. They had no idea that these important geopolitical events were occurring and would affect the outcome of their mission. The dragoon commanders’ more immediate problem was the illness that quickly developed among the group. An intense, feverish illness had begun to spread among the troops soon after their departure from Fort Gibson, likely caused at least in part by a lack of access to good water. Almost immediately

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⁶⁸ One of the best explanations of the Cheyennes’ movement south and their wars with the Kiowas and Comanches is still George Bird Grinnell, The Fighting Cheyennes, (New York, 1915) republished by University of Oklahoma Press in 1955, pp. 35-44. Grinnell dates the origins of hostilities to about 1826. One of the earliest notable battles took place in 1828 between a Cheyenne horse catching party and Comanche hunters returning south across the Arkansas River. See also Donald J. Berthrong, The Southern Cheyennes (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), pp. 81-83.

the five-hundred-man force became significantly less imposing.\textsuperscript{70} To make matters worse, while they were encamped at the mouth of the False Washita River, General Leavenworth himself was taken ill. More than half of the dragoons were also sick by this time, but rather than abandoning the mission, Leavenworth chose to divide the group, sending the healthy portion of the company ahead under the command of Colonel Henry Dodge. This group of about 200 healthy men, including some of the Osage hunters and the other Native guides and representatives, pressed onward, although many of them would later also become ill.\textsuperscript{71}

While Catlin and the dragoons struggled through the difficult terrain of central Indian Territory in a generally southwestern direction, most of the plains Indians would have been engaged in their summer hunts. It was an important time of the year, during which they would secure the proper goods for trade fairs that would occur in the winter months, especially those fairs that the Comanches participated in at the Wichita villages. There they would trade buffalo robes, horses, mules, and captives for important foodstuffs.\textsuperscript{72} It was also a crucial time of the year weather-wise, when it was important not to be caught without water for too long in the intense summer heat, a lesson that the Americans were learning at great cost. The dragoons had left Fort Gibson with only a general idea of where they were going. Their best bet for finding the

\textsuperscript{70} T.B. Wheelock’s report to Col. Henry Dodge, \textit{Senate Executive Documents}, August 27, 1834, p. 74-75. Wheelock notes the serious lack of water while the company was traveling. He described some of the water they drank as of a “milky” color and that instead of streams, they were often forced to drink it from stagnant pools. Wheelock also wrote that 23 men were declared by the army surgeon to be too ill to travel before the companies had departed Fort Gibson. The group may also have been affected by malaria.

\textsuperscript{71} Wheelock reports that only 109 men continued on with Colonel Dodge. The remaining 86 out of the 200 who had still been with Leavenworth up to the point where they reached the Washita, were left behind either because they were ill or because people were needed to care for the ill. See Wheelock’s account, p. 77. On July 18th, while they were encamped at the village, Wheelock reported that thirty-three of the men were ill, including Catlin. (p.80)

\textsuperscript{72} Monahan, “Trade Goods on the Prairie,” pp. 100-06.
Indians that they were looking for was to meet a friendly party of Indians who could guide them, as even those Natives who had accompanied them as guides could often only suggest the best river crossings or routes around obstacles, guessing as much as anyone else where the Comanches and Kiowas might be during the summer.

Eventually, the dragoons found the plains groups by accident. On July 9, some Indians “supposed to be Pawnees” were spotted in the distance, but the dragoons were unable to overtake them.73 Four days and about fifty miles of travel later, nearly a month into the march, Hugh Evans’ account states that when some of the Native members of the group had briefly separated from the main party to chase wild horses, they saw “a number of Pawnees,74 who ran off entirely wild, and they could not get near enough to make any compromise [sic] with them.”75 These bolting Indians may have been following the dragoons for some time, and been surprised by the breakaway group chasing wild horses. Or perhaps it was a chance encounter of people chasing the same herd of wild horses. Regardless, it was clear that these Indians, who would later be revealed as Comanches, were not ready for a confrontation. They needed to pull back to gather more information. The next day, July 14th, the dragoons spotted mounted Indians on the horizon. They had likely discussed the presence of the Americans the night before, and chosen to allow themselves to be seen the following day after consulting with the rest of their party. Testing the

73 Wheelock, p. 77.

74 These were actually Comanches, but like Catlin, Evans was unclear about to whom the term “Pawnee” applied to. In the 1830s, it was used in a very general way to describe essentially any Indians from the Plains, especially those who were thought to be potentially hostile. Wheelock noted that when the company asked the Comanche war party about local Pawnees, “they seemed not to understand the term,” and instead told them about their nearby allies, the “Toyash,” probably an incorrect hearing of “Taovaya,” one of the Wichita bands who had returned to the Red River villages.

Americans, the Comanches waited in the distance, protected by at least a mile and the high bluffs of the southwestern Indian Territory prairie.

Colonel Dodge chose to try approaching the Indians, advancing very slowly at first. When the Americans got close, the Comanches would disappear for awhile, before showing themselves again on the next distant hilltop. Catlin reported that this continued for several miles, until Dodge decided to go forward with a white flag. Recognizing this sign of peaceful intentions, Ish-a-ro-yeh, the Comanche party’s leader, finally decided it was time to greet the Americans. His-soo-san-ches, a Spanish man who had been taken captive at a young age and raised as a Comanche, was given the job of making first contact, probably because of his language abilities. Mounted on a swift white horse, His-soo-san-ches galloped down the bluff behind which the Comanches had concealed themselves, waving a white cloth from his steel lance. He spoke to the dragoons in Spanish. According to Catlin’s account, there was at least one member of the American company who also spoke Spanish, making communication much easier than it otherwise would have been. Evans wrote that it was His-soo-san-ches who finally “told us they were Commches [sic] on a Buffalo and wild horse hunting Expedition.”

The belief of Dodge, Catlin, and many others that the Comanches were in a state of “extreme ignorance” about Americans was quickly put to rest, for as the two groups faced each other:

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76 Catlin, Letters and Notes, Letter No. 41, pp. 51-55

77 Jesus Sanchez, perhaps? I don’t have any reason to believe Evans, who is the only writer about the expedition to give this man an actual name, had any knowledge of the Comanche language or of Spanish, so like most 19th century writers, he recorded the name phonetically, probably assuming it was a Comanche name. Wheelock reported that one of the Cherokees with the party spoke some “imperfect” Spanish. (p. 80)

78 Catlin and Evans’ accounts both corroborate the story of the meeting and the presence of the Spanish captive as the intermediary. Evans was probably not the man in the group who spoke Spanish.

79 “Journal of Hugh Evans,” p. 188.
other, the Comanche initiated contact through shaking hands, the most common of American
greetings. Other groups of Comanches that the dragoons subsequently met also insisted on
performing this greeting with the Americans. This first group of warriors were not only notable
for their friendliness, but also for their obvious wealth. Catlin wrote that each warrior rode a fine
horse and pulled an extra mount of almost equal quality behind him. Some of the warriors had
huge silver spurs, which Catlin believed had been “plundered, no doubt, from the Spaniards in
their border wars, which are continually waged on the Mexican frontiers.” The Comanches
were also incredibly well-armed, each warrior carrying both a gun and a bow. Many warriors
also carried shields and steel lances, prized plunder from their raids in northern Mexico. Access
to firearms was one of the Comanches’s most important concerns during this period, as their
wars with the Cheyenne and other northern Plains groups intensified. The fact that this group
was so well armed demonstrates the profitability of the trade networks that the Comanches had
spent the previous three decades building.

After friendly greetings were exchanged, the Comanches agreed to abandon their hunting
expedition and escort the Americans back to their nearby village. They recognized the
opportunity that this visit from the Americans presented, especially when Colonel Dodge

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80 This stands in marked contrast to the experience of Randolph Marcy just over ten years later, when the
Comanche used a more physical greeting common among their people which involved a hug and the
touching of foreheads, both of which Marcy found incredibly uncomfortable. See Foreman, ed., Marcy
and the Goldseekers: The Journal of Captain R. B. Marcy, with an Account of the Gold Rush Over the

81 Catlin, Letters and Notes, Letter No. 41, p. 56. Catlin had a curious mixture of knowledge and
ignorance of Comanche history. He saw their wealth, but knew they were being pressed from both sides
by Mexico and the United States, even as they engaged in devastating raids on Mexican settlements.

82 I have been unable to find an example of another description of a Comanche or Plains Indian war party
thus armed. I really think that this one was unique. Many of the others tend to emphasize the lack of guns
possessed by Native war/hunting parties. This was partly because bows were considered more useful for
hunting buffalo, and not necessarily as a result of those Indians not having any access to guns at all.
informed them that the purpose of the dragoons’ visit was “to establish an acquaintance and consequently a system of trade that would be beneficial to both.”\textsuperscript{83} This was an opportunity that the Comanches could not pass up, and so they were careful to assure Dodge “that they had never molested the whites it was only [with] the Osage that [they] were at enmity [and] that they would be verry [sic] glad to come on amicable terms with the whites,” hoping that no misunderstandings would get in the way of the reestablishment of their trading connections with the Americans.\textsuperscript{84} Unknowingly, Dodge had already failed in his mission to overawe the Comanches, who could hardly have been intimidated by the sick, poorly provisioned dragoons even if they had not been so glad to see the Americans.\textsuperscript{85} Commercial opportunities were on the Comanches’ minds, and even though it was obvious that the dragoons had not come prepared for trading, holding a friendly meeting with the Americans could certainly lead to real trading in the future.

However, the dragoons’ lack of goods did not stop the Comanches from trying to trade once the Americans arrived at their camp. After traveling with the Comanche war party for a few days through country that “seemed at times to be alive with buffaloes, and bands of wild horses,” they saw mountains in the distance. Catlin believed them to be a “spur” of the Rocky Mountains, but they were actually what are now known as the Wichita Mountains.\textsuperscript{86} The Rockies were over

\textsuperscript{83} Catlin, Letter No. 41, p. 56 [emphasis mine]

\textsuperscript{84} “Journal of Hugh Evans,” p. 189. This statement also indicated that the Comanches had not completely settled the situation with the Osages. Certainly different bands might have had different ideas about a peace settlement.

\textsuperscript{85} Wheelock noted in his report that on the day that they finally met up with the Comanches that the progress of the company was “impeded to-day by sick men in litters,” p. 78.

\textsuperscript{86} Catlin Letter No. 41
five hundred miles to the west, demonstrating that even well-traveled people like Catlin struggled to comprehend the immensity of the Plains.

In the valley of the mountains, not far from present-day Lawton, Oklahoma and near a deep stream, lay the Comanches’ village.\footnote{The exact location of the village has been much debated, but it was certainly not far north of Lawton, Oklahoma. A historical marker now places the location of the camp on the east side of the Wichita Mountains on the Fort Sill Military Reservation. See Gillett Griswold, “The Site of Camp Comanche Dragoon Expedition of 1834,” in \textit{Chronicles of Oklahoma}, 73 (Fall 1995), pp. 322-39.} Much to the dragoons’ surprise, as the group approached the Comanches raised an American flag.\footnote{Wheelock, p. 79.} Evans wrote of their approach to the village that “as far as the eye could extend when we could . . . have a beautiful sight of the Comanche village looking like a great meadow with the small cocks of hay scattered promiscuously over it when on the hight of this eminence the beauties in looking down on the valley was truely grand and romantic.”\footnote{“Journal of Hugh Evans,” p. 189.} Herds of horses and mules, which could be seen for miles by the dragoons as they approached from the east, filled the surrounding countryside. Catlin estimated that the village had between six hundred and eight hundred “lodges” or tepes, and contained at least one thousand people. Based upon Evans’ report, it appears that the actual population of the village was probably closer to three thousand.

Residents of the village immediately began trying to trade with the Americans, and many of the soldiers were willing to trade what items they felt they could spare. Catlin wrote “the officers and men have purchased a number of the best [horses] by giving a very inferior blanket and butcher’s knife, costing in all about four dollars! These horses in our cities in the East . . . would be worth from eighty to one hundred dollars each.”\footnote{Catlin, Letter No. 41, p. 62} Catlin was surprised that the
Comanches were willing to trade such valuable horses for so little. This was partly an indication of their wealth—they had so many horses, and access to so many more, that making a few unequal trades was not a problem. He commented that had the troops brought even the most basic trade goods, they all could have made a fantastic profit. Catlin himself experienced first hand the Comanches’ deep desire for new and interesting trade goods. One Comanche man tried desperately to get Catlin to trade him an old umbrella and a knife, offering in exchange a very fine horse. Wishing to keep the umbrella to shield himself from the summer heat, Catlin declined. The Comanche man hoped Catlin was just holding out for a better deal, so he offered the horse for only the umbrella. When Catlin again refused, the man left and then returned with “one of the largest and finest mules” Catlin had ever seen. When Catlin again refused to make a deal, a nearby soldier offered to take the Comanche man up on his offer, proud to have obtained the magnificent mule for so low a price as an umbrella.\footnote{Catlin, Letter No. 41, pp. 62-63}

The Americans were met at the Comanche village by a chief Catlin called “Tawaquenah.” This was almost certainly the famed Comanche chief Tabaquena, or Sun Eagle, head of the Tenewa band. He appears in a number of Mexican and American documents from the era, and was an important southern Comanche political leader.\footnote{See Hamalainen, \textit{Comanche Empire}, for a description of Tabequana and the importance of material wealth in the rise of men like him to the highest levels of power in Comanche society, p. 259-260. The Tenewa (Those Who Stay Downstream) were an offshoot of the Yamparika band, who lived further east than any of the other bands because of the opportunities provided there through access to American trade.} After the Americans had been in camp for a few days, more Comanches began to arrive, including Ishakonee, who was introduced to the Americans “as the head of the nation,” and appeared in later documents as “Ichacoly.” Catlin described Ishakonee as “a mild and pleasant looking gentleman,” while Tabaquena was a “huge
monster” and “the largest and fattest Indian” Catlin had ever seen. In gathering and introducing their political leaders to the American soldiers, the Comanches were paving the way for serious diplomatic talks. Unfortunately, Catlin was not privy to the meetings that occurred between the Comanche leaders and Colonel Dodge. Evans barely wrote anything about the group’s brief stay at the Comanche village. However, Catlin felt confident to conclude that “From what I have already seen of the Camanchees; I am fully convinced that they are a numerous and very powerful tribe, and quite equal in numbers and prowess, to the accounts generally given of them,” quickly changing his estimation of their population to be somewhere between 30,000 to 40,000.

The Comanches then offered to take the Americans to meet their other allies, the Wichitas and the Kiowas, who would be an important part of any trade that might develop with the Americans. Leaving behind the men who had become ill at the village, Dodge continued on with about 180 men toward the Taovaya villages that recently been reestablished on the Red River, about 100 miles further upriver than the villages American traders had visited in the early nineteenth century. The Wichitas hoped to again function as trade intermediaries for the Comanches. However, it is clear from Wheelock’s account that the relationship between the Wichitas and Comanches was not tension-free. The breakup of the old villages and the scattering of the Wichita bands into Texas had certainly hurt the Wichitas’ power relative to the Comanches. In Hamalainen’s estimation, by the 1830s, the Wichitas were essentially functioning like a band subordinate to Comanche control. Wheelock noted this tension, writing that the

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93 ibid.

94 (which included Catlin. His report of the continued progress of the expedition came from Joseph Chadwick, a wealthy friend of Catlin’s from St. Louis who was traveling with him)
Wichitas had told him they sometimes felt cheated by the Comanches, who were using their more powerful position to strip the Wichitas of their traditional oversight of the east-to-west trading channels and of any control over prices for trade goods.  

When the dragoons arrived at the Wichita village, they were impressed by the “large paches of corn and many other garden vegetables common to a civilized people such as water mellons cucumbers Beans peas &c.” Catlin estimated that there were about 2,000 people in the village, but Evans noted at least four hundred grass dwellings, which he believed housed 12 to 15 people each. This would place the population of the town closer to five or six thousand.

Whatever the exact population, the people of the town were as eager to trade and be friendly with the Americans as the Comanches had been. Evans reported that “The Squaws bring in roasting ears melons green pumpkins squashes &c which they trade to us for buttons tobacco strips off our cloths shirts and many other articles we had to dispose of . . . I have seen a good cotton shirt sell to [a] squaw for two ears of corn.” He also described horse trading among the Comanches at the camp as similar to that which Catlin had observed a few days earlier. The Comanches’ “principle wealth . . . consist of large droves of horses with which the prairie was literally covered.” As such, “a blanket butcher knife & small piece of tobacco is equivalent to a horse in fact I have seen good ponies sold for a common bed blanket.”

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95 See F. Todd Smith, *The Wichita Indians*, pp. 130-32; Wheelock, p. 89. The Comanches were, however, quite dependent on the Wichitas for very important foodstuffs, so they probably would not have pushed the relationship too far. That reliance on Wichita-grown vegetables was probably the reason that they encouraged the Wichita to rebuild on the Red River, and the reason that they brought the Americans there. The villages that the Wichita built were still very convenient places to trade, especially when the Comanche were in a position to have more control over it.


97 ibid.

98 ibid.
were trading on easy terms as a mark of their friendship and as an indication of their great desire for whatever goods that the Americans had to offer. Many Wichita women traded with the dragoons for their agricultural products, others simply gave the food away, demonstrating their hospitality: “we were conducted into their lodges and mellons corn with some dried Buffaloe meat neatly served up and set before us.”

On July 22, 1834, Dodge held a council, which was also attended by the Wacos and some Kiowas, who had received word of the Americans’ arrival and come to the villages. During the council Dodge affirmed that trade was one of the principal reasons he had come in search of the Plains Indians, stating “we have been sent here to view the country and to invite you to go to Washington where the great American chief lives to make a treaty with him, that you may learn how he wishes to send among you traders.” Perhaps even more importantly, Dodge specifically mentioned that these American traders would bring “guns & blankets and everything you want.” However, to gain access to all of these things, the Comanches, Wichitas, and their other allies would have to concede to the desire of the U.S. president “to make peace between you and the Osages and the Cherokees Senacas Delawars and Choctaws and all other red men that you may all meet together as friends and not shed each others blood as you have done,” although the evidence that the Comanches had been involved in direct conflicts with any of these groups but the Osages was minimal at best. This may have been one of the reasons the Comanches were so eager: the U.S. representatives seemed to be asking very little in exchange for the traders that the Comanches wanted.

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100 Wheelock, p. 82.
Dodge spoke at length of his desire for peace between all the Indians of the southwestern borderlands and the United States, and as a symbol of this desire, he presented a Kiowa woman who had been taken captive by the Osages during the brutal 1833 raid.\textsuperscript{101} He insisted that the Indians should receive her as a gift, and would accept nothing in return. General Leavenworth had already promised a payment of $200 to an American trader, Hugh Love, who had originally purchased the Kiowa woman from the Osages, in hopes of either selling her back to her people, or ransoming her to the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{102}

However, Dodge also tried to impress upon the assembled Native groups the power of the United States. Referring to the dragoons’ initial meeting with the Comanches a few days before, he said “they had many horses we could have taken their horses from them but did not; we showed to them that we wanted to be at peace with them.” He felt that the Indians needed to be told of their place in the world—the president of the United States was willing to treat the Plains Indians well, but Dodge tried to emphasize that the Americans did not believe they were under any obligation to do so. These comments make it clear that Dodge was trying to complete the initial goal of the mission to “astonish” the Indians and make them aware of the military might of the United States. Further emphasizing to the Wichitas their own supposed helplessness,

\textsuperscript{101} Wheelock, p. 87. See Monahan, “Trade Goods on the Prairies,” for one of the best accounts of the Osage attack on the Kiowa camp in 1833, pp. 103-107.

\textsuperscript{102} See statement of Henry Leavenworth at Fort Gibson, June 9, 1834 in LR-OIA, Choctaw Agency, Roll #170; and Hugh Love to Colonel Henry Dodge, September 8, 1834, LR-OIA, Osage Agency, Roll #631. Month after the conclusion of the expedition, Love had still not received the promised funds. Gen. Leavenworth’s death surely inhibited the process, as he was no longer there to confirm the promise. Love ended up demanding at least $500 for the girl, claiming that $200 was well below what he had expended not only in ransoming her from the Osage, but in her upkeep between then and the time that she departed with the dragoons.
Dodge also stated, “We have come to your town and found you as defenseless as the Comanchees.”

The next day, Dodge asked the Wichita bands if they would come east with him, for true peace could not be established until a “white paper” was signed between the Indians and the president. He told them that “I do not wish to force you,” but claimed that he had the power to force them to come east. None of the Indians seemed intimidated by Dodge’s statements, which they probably thought were a bit bizarre, but they were ready to cooperate because of the possibility of traders Dodge had promised. He made purposeful threats to the Indians, but Dodge also tried to appear benevolent, which he believed had been demonstrated by his return of the captive Kiowa woman. Additionally, he persuaded the Wichitas to turn over to him a seven-year-old white boy who had been taken captive a few months before. Dodge made a great show of presenting a rifle and a pistol to the Indian who had taken care of the boy since his capture. He then presented a few additional rifles and pistols to individuals chiefs, stating that “they should have further presents, if they would go with him to [the east].”

Dodge hoped to be able to dictate to the Indian leaders and bring the western chiefs back to Fort Gibson immediately, warning that if they did not take the opportunity, they “may not have another.” However, Native leaders at the council continued to pursue their own agendas. We-ta-sha-ro, the Taovaya chief, explained that the wishes of his people and the Americans did

103 Wheelock, p. 85.

104 Wheelock, p. 85. The boy, Matthew Wright Martin, had been captured while out with his father and one of his father’s slaves on the hunting trip near the Red River. The father, known as “Judge Martin,” was killed in the attack. This incident generated a lot of correspondence among American frontier officials, seeming to confirm their belief that the Plains Indians were dangerous savages. They did not realize that the only Americans who were not welcomed to the region by the Comanches were those who intended only to encroaching on their southern hunting range and not to trade. Matthew was eventually returned safely to his family in Texas.
coincide, stating “we wish much to make peace with the Osages. We have been long at war with them.” Even more so than the Comanches, the Wichitas would have been eager for peace with the Osages, for they had borne the brunt of the Osages’ raids in the southwest for over a century. If the Comanches were finally interested in a peace agreement, something might actually be finalized. We-ta-sha-ro also noted that ultimately his people did desire “to see the lands of the Creeks & Cherokees,” but more immediately, he wished to hear from the representatives of the Creeks and Cherokees and other tribes who had accompanied the dragoons as guides and ambassadors. Because of their presence so near the Wichitas’ territory, good relations with the removing Indians was almost as important as trade with the Americans and peace with the Osages. The Cherokee representative at the council was Tahchee, a man known to most Americans as “Dutch.” Tahchee had recently moved from his Texas settlement back to Cherokee lands in Indian Territory, settling in 1831 at the confluence of the Canadian and Arkansas rivers. The inclusion of Tahchee as the Western Cherokees’ representative was an indication of the continually evolving political dynamic in Indian Territory. Tahchee was a western Cherokee leader who had continued making retaliatory raids on the Osages long after most had deemed it unnecessary or politically inexpedient to do so. Tahchee was well known to the Osages for those raids, and thus his presence on the mission would indicate the serious desire of the Cherokee for a truly peaceful relationship not only with the plains Indians, but with the Osages as well.105

Tahchee spoke briefly at the council, stating “I am now going to tell you what the Cherokees bade me say to you if we met as friends—He says to you his people wishes to come to you without fear and that you should visit them without fear. My heart is glad that we are

willing to be friends—a long time ago it was so—there was not war between us—I am rejoiced & my people will be rejoiced when they hear that it may be so again—Look at me you see I speak the truth I have nothing more to say.” Tahchee seemed to be referring to a time in the past when the Wichitas and the Cherokees were friends, a common diplomatic tactic among Native people that he was clearly using as the basis for establishing a new friendship.\footnote{I wonder if Tahchee was also indirectly speaking to the Osages who were present? He was probably also referring to the conflicts that had taken place in Texas between the Cherokees and the Wichitas.}

It is telling of the fractured nature of Osage politics, and the political influence of outsiders, that Beatte, a Frenchman hunter who lived among them, spoke as their representative. He stated “We came for peace—I have brought a few Osages with me who are not afraid to come among [you], with hearts inclined for peace.” Beatte encouraged the plains Indians to listen to Colonel Dodge, and promised them that a close relationship with the Americans would bring them prosperity, as he claimed that it had to the Osage people. If the assembled members of the Plains nations would come to visit the Osages, Beatte stated, they would see the obvious benefits of a similar relationship.

Monpisha, the fifteen year old son of an Osage chief spoke after Beatte, echoing the Frenchman’s sentiments. The boy had been educated at a mission school, and his statements certainly reflected beliefs common to many Indian missionaries. Monpisha warned the plains groups that their “Buffaloe will be gone in a few years,” and thus they needed to learn how to farm and keep cattle or they would starve in the near future. The boy’s presence was no accident. He must have been specifically selected before the troops departed from Fort Gibson. He was like a cultural ambassador, an example of a “wild” Indian who had seen the error of his ways and reformed himself into an American. His presence was simply another tool the U.S. government
attempted to use to gain control over the Plains Indians. If they could not be intimidated by the dragoons, perhaps they could be persuaded by an example of a “reformed” Indian.\footnote{107}

Next, George Bullet, a Delaware leader, told the council that when he returned east, he would inform his people “that we are friends and can hunt without warring together they will be happy. Our children will hereafter be happy and not fear each other. We will no more fear the prairie Indian and you will not be afraid of us.” For the Delaware, then, it was obvious that their greatest concern was securing the ability to hunt on the plains without having to worry about attacks from the Wichitas and Comanches. With a limited territorial base that had shifted from Missouri to Arkansas to Indian Territory and even to Texas within the three previous decades, and a non-unified political structure, access to the Plains was of utmost importance for the Delaware.\footnote{108}

After promising the assembled tribes that “white men will always be just to you,” Dodge went to meet separately with Tabaquena, the Comanche chief. The reason for these separate meetings is unclear. Dodge told Tabaquena essentially the same things as he had the other Native leaders. Dodge declared that the president “wishes to see you all at peace with each other he desires you to come & see him that he may fix a permanent peace with your tribes he will make you presents and he will send traders among you who will serve you with [a] great many things that you want to make you happy.” Dodge also boldly promised the Comanches that the United

\footnote{107}{The accounts of Wheelock and Evans are almost exactly identical when they describe the talks of the tribal representatives. It is possible that Wheelock’s account was written partly with notes from Evans or a copy of his journal.}

\footnote{108}{It is unclear which faction of the Delaware tribe George Bullet represented, but since he was included in the official U.S. delegation, he was probably one of those living on the reservation assigned to the Delaware by treaty. The U.S. was usually not willing to deal with those who had violated treaty stipulations by living elsewhere.}
States would protect them from what he described as “Mexican Indians” if they signed a treaty. However, Tabaquena was noncommittal, informing Dodge that “there are many tribes of Commanches” and so he could not speak for them all. But he promised to “visit them all this year and will say to them what you have said to me.” This is a clear indication that while the Comanches still operated at the individual band level, a more national political system was evolving. Even though he was the leader of the Tenewa, Tabaquena was not willing to commit his own group to any agreement without consulting the other bands.

Tabaquena’s conversation with Dodge was then interrupted by a group of twenty or thirty Kiowas who had just arrived at the Wichita village. They stormed into the Comanches’ camp, incensed that Osages had been made welcome at the village. Evans noted that they were angry because “The Osages not many months previously had murdered a large number of the women & children of the Kiowas whilst the men were absent hunting.” This is a clear reference to the Osage assault on a Kiowa camp near the Red River in the summer of 1833. It was such a brutal incident that it caused major changes to the Kiowas political structure and would not be forgotten for years. However, the situation was diffused when the Kiowas learned that the captive Kiowa woman, Won-pan-to-me had been returned to the Kiowas already present at the council. Somewhat placated, but still seething at the mere presence of the Osage, Dodge “gradually drew them into a friendly council with us.” The urging of their relatives and their close allies to stay

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109 It is unclear which Indians Dodge is referring to; possibly he meant the various bands of Delawares, Kickapoos, Cherokees, and others who lived in Mexican Texas.

110 Catlin mentions the Kiowa woman’s name, as well as that of her brother Tunk-aht-oh-ye, who had been purchased too. However he had been killed in an accident at Fort Gibson just before the expedition departed.
and participate in the council was likely more persuasive than Dodge’s platitudes about peace and friendship.

On July 24th, the third day of the American presence at the Wichita village, another council was held, and this time all of the tribes were in attendance together. Dodge again repeated his desire to make peace, and requested that some of the chiefs accompany him back east. In the end, Evans reported “they finally concluded for some of them to accompany us to Fort Gibson,” including Wetasharo, Teh-toot-sah, a Kiowa chief and Usheekitz, a Waco chief.\textsuperscript{111} Perhaps as many as fifteen Kiowas, eight Comanches, and three Wacos in total initially agreed to go east.\textsuperscript{112} However, the number who actually ended up arriving at Fort Gibson was insignificant, as was the outcome of the talks that were subsequently held there with Stokes and Arbuckle. At the conclusion of the council, the chiefs “demanded of Col. Dodge in writing all the proceedings of the council as a lasting token of peace and friendship.” They knew the value that white people placed on the written word, and they wanted to make sure that the Americans would abide by their promises to send traders among them if the tribes made peace.

Illness continued to strike the Americans throughout the councils with the Indians. About half of the dragoons who had gone on to the Wichita village became ill during the course of their fifteen day stay there. Provisions were also running extremely low. Dodge even mentioned in the final days of the council that he wanted the Indians to make up their minds quickly whether or not they would accompany him back east “in consequence of the scarcity of our provisions.”

\begin{enumerate*}
\item Again the names of the chiefs all come from Catlin. Evans was much less concerned about recording the names of important Indians, probably because he did not view them as important.
\end{enumerate*}
sufficient to contract any disease.” The U.S. dragoons were learning the hard way how difficult any sort of military campaign would be under such conditions. It is no coincidence that subsequent U.S. military forays onto the plains in the 1830s were rare and much better prepared. The Indians told them that if they went north toward the Canadian River, they would find immense herds of buffalo, and thus the Americans proceeded in that direction when they left the Wichita village, rather than returning to the camps where they had left the other ill members of the company. The Americans’ consistent illness and their inability to properly provision themselves contributed the the Indians’ perception of them as weak, although potentially quite useful allies. The plan to “astonish” the Indians had failed miserably.

While camped near the Canadian River on August 5, the dragoons received word that General Leavenworth and at least ten other men had died of the fever at the camp on the Washita. Without their leader, the party limped back to Fort Gibson as men continued to fall ill from lack of drinkable water and exposure to the intense summer heat. As he himself recovered at Fort Gibson, Catlin estimated that about one-third of the dragoon force that had departed perished during the expedition. He viewed the whole expedition as a huge waste of lives and effort.\textsuperscript{113}

The council held at Fort Gibson upon their return accomplished little besides making a plan for another council to be held on the Plains the following year. The Indians left quickly, but they were followed a few days later by a trading party of about eighty men who had wagonloads of items that they planned to trade with the Plains Indians. This group was probably the trading party of Holland Coffee and Silas Colville, an entirely private commercial enterprise that appears

\textsuperscript{113} Writing to the Adjutant General, Colonel Richard Barnes Mason reported that the surviving dragoons were in a terrible condition when they returned to Fort Gibson. Not only were they ill, they lacked adequate clothing and many were without shoes. See Mason to Jesup, October 10, 1834 quoted in “Richard Barnes Mason” by Carolyn Foreman, \textit{Chronicles of Oklahoma}
to have begun organizing around the same time the dragoons first departed. The group probably included both American and Indian traders. Thus the Indians were able to get the traders that they wanted without making any real promises to the United States, while the federal government had done nothing to actually further their Indian policy goals.

This foray by the dragoons onto the plains was only moderately successful. The U.S. government had made contact again with the Comanches, Wichitas, and other western groups, but they had still learned little about the context of the southern plains that might affect the outcome of their removal plans. Instead of impressing the Indians with American military prowess, the dragoons had struggled the entire time they were on the plains. Arbuckle and Stokes were encouraged by the fact that Dodge had been able to actually make contact, engage in multiple friendly meetings, and obtain promises from the Plains Indians to attend an official council with the United States in the future. However, from the Comanches and Wichitas’ perspectives, the arrival of the Americans in the West was a great success. They had been able to engage in some trade, and had been promised much more, which was exactly what they needed as their northern trade channels were blocked by the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Yet just as the Americans had come away understanding little more than they had before about the Plains Indians’ needs and motivations for pursuing peace, so too did the western Indians leave without understanding U.S. motivations. Removal, not trade, was foremost in the Americans’ minds. The Plains Indians would have been aware of the arrivals of tens of thousands of eastern Indians on the edge of the plains, but in 1834 the impact of those arrivals would have remained minimal on their everyday lives. Thus neither the Plains Indians nor the Americans came away from this important meeting with any better conceptions of each other or their relative levels of power.
The first few months of 1835 in Indian Territory were bitterly cold. The Arkansas River was frozen solid between Fort Gibson and the nearest American settlements on the Arkansas border, halting boat traffic and preventing news and supplies from reaching the southwestern frontier.¹ But U.S. government officials in the region, General Matthew Arbuckle, the commanding officer at Fort Gibson, Francis W. Armstrong, the recently appoint superintendent of Indian Affairs for the southwest, and Montfort Stokes, the only original member of the 1832 commission still in the West, had more important reasons than warmer temperatures to be anxious for the arrival of spring. They were anticipating finally being able to hold the treaty council that Dodge had gotten the Comanches and other plains groups to promise to attend. Federal officials believed that they owned the land in Indian Territory by right of the Louisiana Purchase and through the cessions of usage rights made by the Quapaws, Osages, Caddos, and other Native groups in past decades. However, they recognized that the Comanches and other plains nations lived and hunted nearby, a fact that made U.S. officials nervous about the successful continuation of the removal project. Yet this was all the knowledge that federal representatives had about the plains groups, leading them to believe that the “savage” plains peoples would have to be hostile toward the arrival of other Native groups and also possibly to white government officials, traders, and settlers.

¹*Arkansas Times*, February 12, 1835.
The influx of thousands of eastern Indians in the 1830s to the borders of Comancheria was a concern, but the Comanches’ real problem was the aggressive expansion of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes into the upper Arkansas River valley from the north. For the Osages, continued raids by the Pawnees and the loss of territory to removing groups and white settlers significantly influenced their actions during the 1834 dragoon expedition. Federal officials failed to realize that these were the contexts from which the plains tribes approached the meeting at Camp Holmes in August 1835. For U.S. officials, both those east and west, the treaty was about removal, and ensuring that the plains nations did not start a war that would make the continuation of removal policies impossible. However, even though federal officials were concerned about removal as a policy goal, they did not ever consider what such a treaty would mean to the removed nations that were also participants in the treaty. Indeed, Stokes, Arbuckle, and Armstrong had to remind their superiors in the east that delegates from the removed nations would need to be present at the treaty; yet those three men also missed the fact that for the removed nations, the treaty of Camp Holmes was less about eliminating a fear of attack by the plains Indians than it was about establishing economic connections with them.

It is important to explain the events surrounding the Treaty of Camp Holmes for two reasons. First, they further reveal the weakness of the federal government’s power in the West, showing how little federal officials knew about the place they believed could help solve the nation’s “Indian problem.” Second, historians of removal have paid so little attention to this place that it has caused most to miss the valuable insights it can provide about Native perspectives on removal, both those Native people who were being removed, and the plains people who already lived in or near Indian Territory. Exploring the contexts of the 1830s
southwestern borderlands are especially crucial for understanding the real results of the Camp Holmes treaty, which so far in the historiography has almost always been described as a turning point in Native/white relationships on the frontier. Hamalainen pointed this out in the notes to *The Comanche Empire*, writing that “The landmark diplomatic treaty of Camp Holmes has traditionally been seen as the result of U.S. intervention.” However, “This view ignores the compelling commercial interests that drew removed Indians and plains nomads together and reduces Native American diplomacy to a derivative of American initiatives.”\(^2\) This chapter is an attempt to answer Hamalainen’s call to explore the history of this treaty more deeply to see what it reveals about Native control and diplomatic maneuvering in the southwestern borderlands.

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As the winter of 1834–1835 set in, no instructions arrived from Washington about holding a treaty council with the Indians who Dodge had met in the summer and briefly brought to Fort Gibson. Communication between the plains tribes and U.S. officials in the region halted. Stokes, Armstrong, and Arbuckle became nervous that the moment for the treaty council, the moment when the U.S. government was supposed to resolve all of the potential problems that might hinder the implementation of its removal policies, had passed. Were the plains tribes still willing to meet? Dodge had shown that they were eager for a meeting, but it is not clear that he or any of the other federal officials truly understood the reasons why the Comanches and Wichitas sought a council, leading to doubts about their commitment to a council.

Then, in March 1835, encouraging news reached Fort Gibson. Holland Coffee and Silas Colville, who had led the large trading expedition that followed the plains Natives visiting Fort

\(^2\) Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire*, 399n22.
Gibson back west in the summer of 1834, returned to resupply after a successful season of trading. With the departure of the 1834 dragoon expedition, Coffee, a well-established Arkansas merchant, had sensed an opportunity to capitalize on information he had received from other traders about the commercial potential that awaited anyone willing to venture west onto the plains. Coffee gathered a group of traders, both white and Native, and waited at a camp on the Canadian River, preparing to depart as soon as the dragoons returned. The group established a post about a hundred miles downstream from the Wichita villages that Dodge had visited.

Coffee and his associates were eager to spread the news of their successful winter adventures. An article in the *Arkansas Advocate* in March 1835 reported that some “Cumanche and Wakoe chiefs had been in to trade,” and, finding the terms that were being offered satisfactory, the chiefs later returned with more goods to trade with “a large company of their followers.” The trading was so successful that Coffee had returned to Arkansas not only to resupply with trade goods, but also to obtain materials to construct a permanent post and build boats to move goods up the Red River to the establishment.

When Silas Colville met Francis Armstrong in March 1835, he made sure to mention “that the Kiaways, [Wichitas] & Camanche tribes are delighted with their visit to Fort Gibson, and [I have] seen the flag, and medals give

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3 Captain John Stuart to Lieutenant Seawell, March 28, 1835, enclosed in a letter from Matthew Arbuckle to the Adjutant General, April 3, 1835, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921. This report stated that “There were “about 30 men, including a few Cherokees, and other Indians of the Arkansas, who are with him, but who are not engaged as hands - He has I think about 20 white men.”


5 *Arkansas Times*, March 7, 1835. Coffee and his associates were not the only American going west in the 1830s. Josiah Gregg, William and Charles Bent, John Gantt were notable American traders with the plains Indians during this period. Ironically, it was the Bent brothers’ establishment of a large trading post on the Upper Arkansas that helped fuel the Cheyenne/Comanche wars that pushed the Comanches east for trade connections. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, pp. 147-61.
them at Gibson.” It was because of the “friendly relations established at the Council [the previous summer], between the wild tribes, the whites; and the eastern emigrant tribes, together with the Osages, has been such, that the firm felt safe” in going west to trade. Even though a friendly meeting had already occurred, the Plains Indians were still “looking anxiously for the meeting, spoken of; and recommended by Col. Dodge,” where they planned to make “the great peace.”

It seems likely that Coffee and Colville coordinated their efforts to ensure that the federal government held a treaty meeting because it so clearly benefited their personal business interests. Coffee told John Stuart, a captain in the 7th Infantry, that members of the plains groups who had met Dodge came to his post on a daily basis and the Indians were “in the full, and confident expectation, of holding a meeting with him [Dodge] or some other Agent of the Government of the U. States, either in the latter part of June or early part of July next, at some point within their own country.”

Coffee also hinted to Stuart that if the government did not fulfill its promise for a treaty council, the situation on the frontier might become dire. Stuart wrote that Coffee told him “if a Meeting of some kind, is not had with them, in compliance with the promises made to them, that they will be disappointed, and consequently become faithless, and disaffected towards the Government of the United States, and will return again to their former Predatory course of warfare, on the Semi-Civilized Inhabitants of the South Western Frontier, with re-doubled fury.”

Coffee knew how to manipulate federal officials to get their attention, reminding Stuart that the

6 Armstrong to Herring, March 6, 1835, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
7 Captain John Stuart to Lieutenant Seawell, March 28, 1835, enclosed in a letter from Matthew Arbuckle to the Adjutant General, April 3, 1835, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
8 ibid.
whole project of Indian removal could fall apart quickly because the plains Indians were really just savages who would become “predatory” if their demands were not met. Conveniently, Coffee also told Stuart that the plains tribes would be happy to meet U.S. representatives at his trading post, promising “that an Officer of the Government, would be perfectly safe” traveling there. Coffee’s story fully convinced Stuart, who wrote after the meeting “that if a friendly meeting is not held with those Indians . . . an Indian War on the Western Frontier will be inevitable.” Even if, as some military leaders believed, Dodge had overstepped his authority in promising to hold the treaty meeting, Stuart felt that the government should honor the promise “without regard to trouble or expense, or any other present consideration.”

Stuart communicated this information to his friend Lieutenant Seawell, who was stationed at Fort Gibson. Seawell found Stuart’s information so concerning that he passed it on to Arbuckle, who then passed it on to Roger Jones, the adjutant general of the U.S. army, on April 3, 1835. Arbuckle added his own insistences that the government give himself, Stokes, and Armstrong the authority to sign a treaty so that they could take advantage of the opportunity—after years of difficulty even finding them, the plains tribes were willing and eager for a meeting, but still no one in the west had the authority to do anything official. There is hardly a better example of the federal government’s inefficiency in the West.

Soon after Coffee and Colville’s visit, Arbuckle wrote to Armstrong to say that “two [Wichita] and one Wakoe Indian” had come to Fort Gibson to inquire about the meeting Dodge had promised, again indicating their deep interest in the reestablishment of peaceful trading

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9 ibid.

10 Arbuckle to Adjutant General, April 3, 1835, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
relationships on their eastern borders. Arbuckle invited Armstrong to come to Fort Gibson to further assure the Native visitors that the promised treaty council would happen soon. Armstrong arrived at Fort Gibson on April 21, but dialogue between the parties was minimal because despite Arbuckle’s “considerable exertions,” he had been unable to procure the services of Oscimka, a Wichita woman who had been taken captive by the Osages and who served as an interpreter.  

Armstrong’s duties as superintendent and Choctaw agent forced him to quickly leave Fort Gibson. Sounding embarrassed about the inefficiency of his government, Armstrong asked Arbuckle to make sure that their Native guests did not leave for at least another “two mails,” in hopes that instructions from Washington would arrive so the Wichitas could be given tangible information about a council. Finally, on May 4, 1835, Stokes, Armstrong, and Arbuckle received instructions from Lewis Cass regarding a treaty, which described what they were allowed to promise and what they were allowed to spend. Cass appointed the three men as the official “commissioners” with the authority “to hold a treaty with the Camanche and other wandering tribes of Indians west of the State of Missouri & the Territory of Arkansas.” However, the letter indicates that Cass had very little knowledge about the actual circumstances in Indian Territory.

Cass may not have received news about the most recent developments in the region, but little had changed since the reports from the Dodge expedition the year before. Cass showed little

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11 Arbuckle to Armstrong, April 15, 1835, and Armstrong to Herring, April 30, 1835, both in LR-OIA, West. Sup. Roll #921. Oscinka’s residence among the Osages says a lot about the extent of their past raiding activities, and how much those circumstances were changing by the 1830s.

12 Armstrong to Herring, January 22, 1835; Armstrong to Herring, May 1, 1835; Captain McCabe to F.W. Armstrong, March 20, 1835 all in West. Sup. Roll #921.

knowledge of that information, or any of the letters that Stokes and Arbuckle had sent during the previous two years. Like many other federal officials before and after him, Cass continued to act as if the southwestern border was in constant danger of erupting into war because of the hostile intentions of groups like the Comanches, regardless of information he received to the contrary, and despite the fact that removal had been going on for decades and no apocalyptic war led by the Plains Indians had yet begun. This myth was perpetuated because much of the information about western Indians was unreliable and because it fit the worldview of most Washington politicians and bureaucrats (and most white Americans) that nomadic hunter-gatherers were always threatening. Ahistorical thinking about the U.S. government’s involvement in the region’s past contributed to the perpetuation of this idea as well.

Thus Cass’s instructions to Stokes, Arbuckle, and Armstrong are jarring to read within the context of events actually occurring in Indian Territory. Cass stated that the commissioners should focus on establishing “amicable relations between the Camanches and other predatory tribes roaming along our western border and the United States and between these tribes and the other nations of Indians in that region.” The principal goal of the commissioners was “to impress upon them [all the Indians they could assemble] in the most solemn manner the obligation of remaining at peace.” Cass’s characterization of the the plains tribes as “predatory” colored the rest of his instructions. He insisted that the “predatory” habits of the plains tribes were well-known to the commissioners, and that he did not need to remind them of “the repeated injuries which they have committed against citizens of the United States, and against other Indians
entitled to the protection of the Government.”

It is unfortunate that Cass did not give more details about the specific instances he was thinking of when he wrote those instructions. What were the “repeated injuries” that he believed were causing trouble? Perhaps he was referring to the conflicts between the Osages, the Cherokees, and other emigrant tribes, or maybe even the centuries-long conflict between the Osages and the Comanches. But those conflicts had diminished by the 1820s, and the Osage and Comanche conflict had not involved the removed nations or American settlers.

None of the reports from federal agents in the region contained actual evidence of raids by plains nations on the removed tribes. Cass might have been referring to reports in which Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, and others complained about thefts that they blamed on “Comanches,” or the “savage” plains Indians, who were convenient scapegoats for any crime committed in the region. All of the available evidence suggests that none of the plains Indians, especially the Comanches, ventured far enough east to steal from the removed groups. The Comanches were focused on raiding northern Mexico— they had no need to raid eastern Indian Territory. In fact, as described above, there is more evidence indicating that the removed groups were anxious to trade with the plains nations, not to be protected from them. Indian Territory was certainly a complicated and conflict-ridden place in 1835, but not for the reasons that Cass described.

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14 Cass to Stokes, Armstrong, and Arbuckle, March 23, 1835, Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, Roll #15. This is why LaVere’s Contrary Neighbors is so problematic. LaVere read sources like Cass’s letter of instructions uncritically, taking him at his word that this was what conditions in Indian Territory were like in 1835.

15 Petition by a Creek and Cherokee delegation in Washington, D.C., to Lewis Cass, May 14, 1834, LR-OIA, Creek Agency West, Roll #236.
In light of past U.S. military experience in the region, Cass’s insistence that the plains Indians “might no doubt be subdued and even destroyed were it necessary; by the United States” is laughable. Cass believed that the U.S. had refrained from doing so only because of the “great expense” that would be involved, and because it would be “revolting to humanity” to annihilate them without attempting “pacification” first.16 Cass also instructed the commissioners to threaten the tribes by telling them that “the United States will be compelled to interpose by force” if any of the Indians broke an agreement for peace. Cass’s remarks demonstrate nothing but willful ignorance about the realities of power on the western borderlands.

Not only did Cass display ignorance about the military and political realities of the region, but he also had no conception of the region’s economic situation. Only ten thousand dollars, hardly a large sum even for the time, was appropriated for all the expenses related to creating “permanent tranquility” on the southwestern border. Cass acknowledged that the amount was “a moderate one,” and so he instructed the commissioners to assemble only a few Indian representatives to cut down on costs. Cass also stipulated that the treaty would provide “no annuities or other considerations,” which anyone who knew anything about Native diplomacy would have realized was incredibly foolish and unrealistic. Because he considered the Comanches hostile and thought they had never been in contact with Americans, he stipulated that they should receive presents, but everything else was to “be managed in the most frugal manner” possible.17 Cass also insisted that Fort Gibson was “the proper place” for the meeting to be held, despite knowing that Dodge had promised (and the Indians had requested) a meeting on


17 Stokes and Arbuckle often complained to Cass about the minimal appropriations. Stokes and Arbuckle to Cass, August 3, 1835, LR-OIA, West. Sup. Roll #921.
the plains. This was Indian diplomacy on the cheap. Convinced that the U.S. government wielded all the power in the situation, Cass looked to solve a problem that might delay removal with as little expense as possible. Thus on the basis of a few presents, lots of promises, and some silly threats, the federal government hoped to establish control over the actions of the plains Indians, who were at that moment at the peak of their political, economic, and military power.

Once they received Cass’s instructions, Arbuckle and Stokes sprang into action, sending an express to Armstrong at the Choctaw Agency to inform him of the news. Stokes immediately began penning a response to Cass, writing that it was “a fortunate circumstance” that the three Wichita men who had recently visited Fort Gibson were still in the area, residing at Osage chief Clermont’s town. Stokes hoped to use the three men as contacts to “send a message inviting their Chiefs and those of the Camanches, Kioways and other bands, to meet us in all the month of June.”

However, some of the real diplomacy that would lead to peace on the plains was already taking place at Clermont’s village. The Osages had been waging war on the Wichitas for over a century, and while the Wichitas were eager for a council with the Americans for economic reasons, peace with the Osages was just as important. And if both groups also made an alliance with the U.S., it would be a way to further solidify their own alliance by acknowledging mutual friendship with another group.

Cass had not mentioned the Osages at all in his instructions, which was curious, because for years the Osages had been described to officials in Washington as “the most savage & troublesome Indians on this frontier.” In Cass’s view, because the Osages already had

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18 Stokes to Cass, May 5, 1835, Lewis Cass Collection, Box 1, Minor Archives, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma.

19 Samuel Stambaugh to Cass, October 9, 1834, LR-OIA, West. Sup. Roll #921.
numerous treaties with the U.S. government, many provisions of which they had failed to keep, they were not entitled to further diplomatic consideration. However, Stokes and Arbuckle knew that the participation of the Osages was key to getting an actual peace agreement signed. Osage representatives had attended the talks on the plains held by Dodge the previous year, and despite the factionalism among them, they remained important political actors in the region.

Stokes and Armstrong sent A. P. Chouteau to Clermont’s village to find the Wichita visitors and Osage leaders who were willing to participate in a treaty council. Chouteau returned three days later with the Wichita men, Osage leaders Black Dog and Tally, and Oscimka, the interpreter. The Wichita men, Nuck, Tauacaquerie, and Chotadaces, quickly dispelled hope that a council could be held at Fort Gibson in June. The three men told the commissioners that “it will be impossible to procure even an interview with the Camanche and other Chiefs of their tribes until late in July . . . [because] a War party has gone over the Mexican line . . . and that the remaining bands are hunting in the great prairie; and that neither party will return until the green corn raised by the subordinate bands is eatable.” This statement, disappointing though it was to U.S. officials, nicely sums up how the Comanches had built their commercial empire. They were away south, raiding horses and livestock from Mexico, which they would then exchange with the Wichitas for corn, squash, and other important sources of nutrition.

Having spent three years in Indian Territory and still never seen the Comanches, Stokes’s frustration is obvious in his letters to Cass as he realized that the U.S. government would have to wait on the schedules of the western nomads, whom most federal officials could hardly believe had a schedule at all. Stokes informed Cass that although he, Arbuckle, and Armstrong would

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20 Stokes to Cass, May 14, 1835, Lewis Cass Collection.
make “every effort in our power in endeavoring to have the Treaty in conformity with the views of the Government” and would “not abandon these efforts as long as there may remain a probability of accomplishing the object,” they were preparing for other possibilities. Stokes reminded Cass that Dodge had promised the western Indians that the government would meet them out on the plains, and that the Wichitas had emphasized the importance of this promise, stating that “the Chiefs of the Western Tribes confidently expect the fulfillment of that promise.”

On May 20 Stokes and Arbuckle sent a detachment of dragoons commanded by Major Richard Barnes Mason southwest of Fort Gibson to establish a campsite from which Osage and Wichita messengers could be sent to contact the Comanches. If the Plains Indians did not agree to come to Fort Gibson, the council would be held at the camp. Mason chose a site at the mouth of the Little River, a tributary of the North Canadian that was about 150 miles from Fort Gibson. It was a compromise position—close enough for easy communication with the fort and close enough to the plains to make the Comanches and the Wichitas feel comfortable. Meanwhile at Fort Gibson, Stokes and Arbuckle prepared for the council by meeting with Osage leaders. One Osage band led by Tally, who had participated in the dragoon expedition of the previous year, had departed with Mason to procure meat to supply the troops and treaty participants, indicating their assent to the proceedings. Black Dog’s followers remained uncommitted until Arbuckle and Stokes gave them ammunition that they claimed was to hunt game to feed themselves during

21 ibid.

the council and they promised “to refrain from any hostile acts towards the Comanche’s and other wandering Western Tribes.”

Meanwhile, at Fort Gibson, Stokes and Arbuckle continued to prepare for the council by meeting with various Osage leaders. Tally’s band, which had participated in the dragoon expedition the previous summer, readily agreed and departed on May 19 with a group of hunters to procure buffalo meat to feed the council’s attendees. Black Dog’s band stayed behind at Fort Gibson, and eventually Arbuckle and Stokes “obtained the promise of Black Dog and the Osages to refrain from any hostile acts towards the Comanche’s and other wandering Western Tribes.” They also agreed to attend the council if the U.S. agents would give them ammunition to go hunt game to feed themselves during the meeting.

Other Osages were not so easy to convince. Clermont II had been an influential Osage chief for some time, especially after he lead many Osages permanently south to the Arkansas River following disagreements with the Little Osage and Great Osage bands over the 1808 treaty signed with the United States. For years he had been able to successfully ignore many U.S. demands on himself and his people, and as his meetings with the Wichitas had demonstrated, Clermont believed peace with the Plains Indians was the right policy. However, the different Osage bands, which probably numbered at least six in the 1830s, had traditionally acted as separate political units; no single leader was recognized as being in charge of the whole nation. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the factionalism between and among the bands had

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23 Ibid, 400.
drastically increased, especially when the Great and Little Osages failed to aid the Arkansas Osages against the Cherokees. Stokes and Arbuckle reported that they had met with Clermont, “La Foi” (probably a descendant of Great Osage chief La Fou), and twenty-five other prominent men, and stated that those leaders had promised all the Osage bands would attend the council once they returned from their summer hunts. But in contrast to the chiefs, the warriors at the meeting “expressed a perfect indifference as to the success of the Treaty,” claiming “that the plunder of Comanche horses, and unrestrained hunting of Game on the Prairie, was more profitable to them any anything they received from the Government of the United States for acceeding to, or aiding in a treaty of Peace.” Concerned about getting full compliance from the clearly divided Osages, Arbuckle and Stokes instructed Chouteau to inform the Osages that they were expected to be at the treaty meeting and told him “not to pay out the annuity to the Osage’s until, after the treaty.”

Stokes and Arbuckle then tried to overcome another flaw in Cass’s instructions, which was the failure include representatives from the removed tribes in plans for the council. Stokes wrote to Cass that they “must have a portion” of the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, and Senecas, in addition to the Osages, with them if they were to achieve a “permanent peace” with the plains tribes, because it was these people who were “liable to suffer from their depredations.” In leaving the removed tribes out of the process, Cass was essentially saying that the U.S. could handle

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diplomacy for them, further denying their status as sovereign nations, a serious problem that Stokes and Arbuckle tried to correct.²⁷

Stokes and Arbuckle delayed their departure for the treaty grounds through June, holding out hope that if runner finally found the Plains Indians, they might still agree to have the council at Fort Gibson. Armstrong also delayed his departure because of a serious illness. However, from his sickbed, Armstrong continued to participate in preparations, writing to Elbert Herring, the commissioner of Indian affairs, for further clarification about the goals of the upcoming council. Armstrong noted that the “general policy” of the federal government had “always been to take a few of the [chiefs] belonging to each nation and travel them to the city of Washington, for the purpose of letting them see, what can not be made known to them by any other mode.”

Armstrong, like many others, believed that the plains Indians needed to be convinced of their utter insignificance in comparison with the United States. The dragoon expedition of the previous year had completely failed to make such an impression, and so Armstrong thought it was best to send them to Washington, for it was “in vain to say to them that they are not as great as any nation; and indeed equally as powerful.” In Armstrong’s opinion, the Comanches were especially guilty of this ignorant vanity because they had “great conceptions of their own power.”²⁸

If the Comanches had misplaced conceptions of their own power, so did Armstrong, Stokes, Arbuckle, and Cass. Because they were in the midst of accomplishing removal, one of the long-desired outcomes of federal Indian policy, it is unsurprising that U.S. officials believed

²⁷ Stokes to Cass, May 14, 1835, LR-OIA, West. Sup. Roll #921. Stokes’ language is instructive here: he wrote that they were “liable to suffer” from raids by the Plains tribes, not that they were suffering from such raids at the time.

²⁸ Armstrong to Herring, June 18, 1835, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.
that they could exercise control over western Indians in the same way they were becoming able
to control Native people in the East. But as subsequent events would prove, no such U.S. power
existed in the West. In the southwest of the 1830s, centers of federal power were so far away that
they were not even on the periphery of the Plains Indians’ political and economic power centers.
Sitting in his office at the Choctaw Agency, Armstrong had no real idea of the extent of the
people, goods, and political power controlled from the Comanches’ imperial center on the
southern plains. But in one sense Armstrong may have been right about the Comanches’ belief in
the extent of their power. After decades of dominance on the Plains, they were rattled by the
aggressive actions of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, which threatened their access to trade
goods, hunting territory, and valuable wintering grounds in the upper Arkansas River valley. Yet
they remained dominant to the south, raiding Mexico at will. The Comanches’ troubles from the
north may have caused them to miss the real future implications of the arrival of the southeastern
Indians and the increased attention of the U.S. government on the southwestern border. Thus in
the summer of 1835, neither the Americans nor the Comanches knew enough about each other to
have reasons to temper their conceptions of their own power.

The only group truly prepared to do that in 1835 were the Osage chiefs who supported
the treaty council. Over the course of the eighteenth century the Osages had built a commercial
empire of their own, trading with the French, Spanish, British, and Americans who came up the
Arkansas and Missouri rivers in search of valuable furs. The Osages had jealously and
effectively guarded access to the West for many decades. They had mercilessly raided Wichita
villages for plunder, nearly halted trade traffic up the Red River, and competed with the
Comanches for buffalo-hunting territory. But by the summer of 1835, with pressure mounting
from white American settlements, removing Indian nations, and the federal government, many Osage chiefs finally realized the necessity of tempering conceptions of their people’s power. It had greatly diminished, but it was not gone. To survive, they had to adapt, and this meant changing patterns of behavior and ending conflicts that had lasted for generations. The same was true for the members of the eastern Native nations in Indian Territory. Removal from their homelands was a striking realization of their own lack of power, but they did not believe their sovereignty was gone. To survive, they had to use the new context to which they had been removed to reassert their sovereignty.

By early July, after word had begun to spread about the council, various nations began arriving near Major Mason’s camp. As many as seven thousand Indians, most probably Comanches, were encamped within a fifty mile radius of Mason’s camp. On July 11, an Osage messenger arrived at Fort Gibson and reported that the Comanches were willing to meet at the camp. Stokes and Arbuckle chose August 20 as the day when the council would begin and named the treaty grounds “Camp Holmes.” Stokes finally had to tell Cass that “Our last letters from Major Mason compel us to abandon all hopes of bringing in the great Western Tribes to this place. They alledge that Colonel Dodge promised that Commissioners of the United States should meet them for the purpose of Treating, on the Great Western Prairie, and upon this promise they rely.”

On August 6, Arbuckle and Stokes departed for the treaty grounds without Armstrong, who sent in a doctor’s note saying that he was too ill to travel, but took with them representatives from many of the removed groups that the commissioners had personally invited despite Cass’s

exclusion of them from his instructions. Additionally, they brought more troops from the fort because Major Mason was nervous about the thousands of Indian warriors near the camp.

Hundreds of Native people awaited them at Camp Holmes, including many Cherokees, Creeks, and Choctaws who had arrived ahead of the party from Fort Gibson. Senecas and Quapaws were also present, in addition to the Wichitas, Comanches, and Kiowas.

The council finally began on August 22. Stokes spoke first, briefly addressing the assembled leaders to assure them that “the President of the United States has nothing to ask of you, but to be at peace with the people of the United States and with the nations of Indians who have treaties of his people.” Arbuckle gave a more lengthy speech, also emphasizing that the president wished to make a treaty so that he could fulfill other treaties made with the removed tribes that promised protection in their new homes. Arbuckle clearly intended the treaty to forever resolve conflicts between the plains and removed Indians. He admonished the Plains tribes to “think well . . . so that all that is contained in the Treaty you may sign, may be well received by your nations, and that you will not agree to any thing which you will not cause your people to strictly comply with.” Arbuckle had enough experience in the West to realize that Native nations lacked coercive political hierarchies that made the enforcement of treaty promises difficult. Additionally, Arbuckle insisted that “your great Father has not sent us here to ask of you anything except what is necessary for your own good.” Although he often had a better understanding of the situation in the West and of Native cultures and customs than others,

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Arbuckle still believed that he, as a representative of the U.S. government, had the right to tell Indians what to do for their own good.\textsuperscript{32}

The text of the treaty itself contained the usual platitudes, promising “perpetual peace and friendship,” and asking that all past “injury or act[s] of hostility . . . shall be mutually forgiven and forever forgot.” One of the most important articles for the U.S. government was the provision that would require the plains tribes to allow U.S. citizens to “pass and repass through their settlements or hunting ground without molestation.” The treaty also insisted “that each and all of the said nations or tribes have free permission to hunt and trap in the great Western Prairie, West of the cross Timber, to the Western limits of the United States.” The U.S. government was thus asserting sovereignty over a borderlands space filled with people that they knew virtually nothing about. This statement was also a tacit admission that federal removal plans had not gone entirely as planned. Forcibly removed tribes had to hunt to survive in the west because they usually arrived in an utterly destitute condition, and promised federal aid took months, or even years to arrive, if it arrived at all. The treaty also stipulated that the Comanches, Wichitas, and other plains groups had to treat members of all other groups that would remove to the west in the future with the same rights as the tribes specifically named in the treaty. It was a comprehensive document intended to solve the “problem” of the plains tribes and ensure the continuation of forced removal.\textsuperscript{33}

Proceedings at the council on August 23 were dominated by Native representatives. Kosharoka, a Wichita chief, spoke first. He expressed his approval of the treaty, and affirmed

\textsuperscript{32} ibid, p. 408.

peace with the Osages, stating, “I have shaken hands with them, and I intend holding them fast by the hand.” But he asked that no removing Indians settle in the vicinity of Camp Holmes. He believed that “if they do they will drive off the game, and this is the only place we have to come for it.” Access to game might have been a problem, but the Wichitas had plenty of hunting territory to the West. What Kosharoka was really concerned about was the fact that large populations of removed groups settling in the area might prevent the Wichitas from achieving the middleman status between American traders and the Comanches that they so greatly desired to reestablish. Indeed, it was through trade that Kosharoka would ensure the rest of the Wichita bands knew what had transpired at the council. He stated “In my country there is a place we trade, and all that has passed here we will then tell our people.”

The speech by Koustowah, another Wichita chief, confirmed that the council was also about creating good relationships with the Osages, the removed tribes, and rekindling their alliance with the Comanches. “The Great Father has taken pity on us this day,” Koustowah said. “He has made us friends with all these our red brothers, and we will hold them fast in our arms. Not only these people will we hold fast by the hand, but the Comanches that we now are at peace with.” Koustowah also stated that he wanted to move east “down to my Old Town, the place where I was born” likely the old Wichita villages on the Red River that had previously served as waypoints in the Comanche/American trade: “I want to move down [the Red River] because I am too far out of the way, and I want to be close by, so as I can visit you as my neighbours, as there will not be any more danger [from the Osage] in travelling these Prairies after this day.” He wanted to reclaim the lower portion of the Red River that bordered Indian Territory before it was

filled by other Native emigrants, even though he also wanted to trade with the removed groups, stating “There are some of my red brothers who talk of going home with me, and if they do, not one of my people will touch the least thing they have,” indicating traders would be safe from possible thieves if they came to trade with the Wichitas.35

Koustowah’s desire to block further settlement of removing tribes along the Red River must have concerned Stokes and Arbuckle, but not as much as the departure of most of the Comanches a few days before the council began. However, the representatives that the Comanches did leave, Ichacoly and Tabaquena, were two leaders who had met with Colonel Dodge the previous summer. Their presence and Ichacoly’s recorded comments during the council provide important insights into the meaning of the council for the Comanches’ diplomatic goals. Ichacoly began his speech to the assembled representatives by stating “I am the only head chief of my nation,” which was likely his way of reassuring the Americans that he had the authority to make treaty agreements. He was also probably trying to contrast his own position with that of Tabaquena. Subsequent events make it clear that there was some division among the Comanches regarding their diplomatic policies toward the groups on their eastern border. Ichacoly and Tabaquena would later come to represent the two sides of that division.36

However, at the August 1835 council, those disagreements had yet to surface, at least not to the knowledge of the federal officials observing and recording the Comanches’ actions. In his speech, Ichacoly addressed the early departure of the majority of his people, stating that they “all wished nothing but peace, and friendship, and I have staid here to represent them all.”

Comanche leader did, however, also make sure the Americans knew he had paid them respect by waiting so long, and felt he should be accorded a certain level of respect in return, stating “I have staid here a long time, and I wish you to give me something.” Ichacoly also explained the reason that the Comanches had left some representatives: “Half of my body belongs to the Osages and half to the Comanches and all the rest I will hold close to my heart.” All those Indians would be respected by the Comanches when they came west to hunt or trade. Ichacoly may have actually been of both Osage and Comanche descent. Considering the long history of their wars against each other, it would not be surprising if children of captives existed, but it is more likely that Ichacoly was speaking metaphorically, emphasizing that reconciliation between the two nations was complete. Thus for the Comanches, formal participation in the council was about confirming peace with the Osages; plans for trade with the removed groups had already been established before the American commissioners had even arrived.\(^37\)

Speeches by members of the removed groups two days later also hinted at one of the other reasons that the Comanches had departed early. Roley McIntosh, long-time leader of the western Creeks, spoke first. Historian Grant Foreman has used this speech to show that the removed Indians viewed the plains Indians as savages and wanted to participate in the federal government’s efforts to civilize them, but that interpretation completely misrepresents McIntosh’s goal and the context of the removed Indians’ experiences in Indian Territory up to that point. McIntosh’s speech had little to do with his beliefs about the plains tribes’ level of “civilization” and everything to do with commerce and controlling how the federal government

\(^{37}\) Foreman, ed., “Journal of the Proceedings,” 413. Kavanagh ignores the important implications of Ichacoly’s statement, writing “The implication that [he] was half Osage is unclear” (240).
perceived his own nation.\textsuperscript{38} Having failed to secure federal help in outfitting the joint Creek and Cherokee diplomatic trading expedition the previous spring, McIntosh saw this council as another opportunity to establish the relationship with the plains tribes that he and his people desired.

He began with platitudes about how “our little father, the white man” had “done us much good.” McIntosh knew it was important to be seen convincing the plains Indians to be peaceful with the Americans. McIntosh then described how the Creeks had become “friends” with the Osages, hoping that by emphasizing his nation’s relationship with the Comanches’ new allies, establishing trade relations would be easier. Because everyone gathered there was “all of one colour,” McIntosh believed that they should conduct themselves peacefully.\textsuperscript{39} Then, in a traditional gesture, McIntosh stated, “we the Muscogees give you these white beads. They are the emblem of peace. Our people will now travel the road from one town to another. They will be open and clear. With all the different people we have made peace, we have made roads to their houses. We will now extend these roads to your towns.”

Traffic, people, and commerce would flow freely through the southwest, with the Creeks leading the way. He then passed around gifts of tobacco, saying “I want all your Warriors to smoke of it, and when the white smoke ascends, altho I shall be at home and not see it, it will be the same as if I was present. These white beads are the emblem of peace, when you go home you must let all your people draw them through their hands. It will be the same as if I was shaking hands with them.”\textsuperscript{40} Significantly, McIntosh also announced that some of his people would be

\textsuperscript{38} LaVere, \textit{Contrary Neighbors}, p. 97.


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
accompanying the remaining Comanches back west when the council ended. It seems obvious that the Creeks who arrived before Stokes and Arbuckle had met with the Comanches to work out plans for a trade fair. Having made a trade connection they desired, the majority of the Comanches departed, leaving Ichacoly and Tabaquena to confirm peace with the Osages.

Mushulatubbee, a Choctaw chief who had recently removed to Indian Territory but also briefly met the Wichitas at Fort Gibson the previous year, spoke next, expressing his happiness to have “an opportunity of seeing our brothers who live in the West” and said he was “glad” that they had made a peace agreement. Even though Mushulatubbee was not among them, the Choctaws who had lived in the West since the early nineteenth century and suffered numerous raids were happy for peace with the Osages. He then echoed McIntosh’s sentiments, hailing the peace council as happening only “through the agency of our White Father,” and giving tobacco to the Wichita and Comanche chiefs, saying “we have now established the white road to your towns. Here is some Tobacco. When you go, home you must smoke of it, and when the white smoke ascends, although I shall be at home, and will not see it, it will be the same as if I was with you.” Mushulatubbee did not mention any immediate plans for trade with the plains groups as McIntosh had done, but the council had likely given him a positive impression of the possibilities for future trade.41

Osage war leader Black Dog spoke next. Clermont had become ill and was unable to attend as promised. La Foi, who was supposed to represent the northern Osage bands was reported by Clermont’s brother to be “at his Town and would not come,” evidence that even

among the chiefs, the Osages were not united in their policy goals.\textsuperscript{42} Like McIntosh, Black Dog was careful to attribute the gathering and its success to the efforts of the “Great Father.” He also referenced U.S. removal policies and the need to abide by them, reminding those at the council that “it is the great Fathers word that we are all moving to this country.” Yet Black Dog also emphasized the transformation of his own attitude as a way of confirming the peace agreements with the assembled Native representatives: “Once I did not speak to any of these here, but I am now friendly with them all.” He too wanted a “big open road” to exist between all the nations of the region. Indicating the significant changes that his people were making to bring about peace, Black Dog reminded the Native leaders that “[t]he acts we used to do we put aside now, and I expect you do also.”\textsuperscript{43}  

Thomas Brant, a Seneca chief, also gave tobacco and spoke of the creation of the “white road” to the western Indians. He explained that “our young warriors travel much, they travel through the Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw, Osage and Quapaw Nations,” for purposes of trade, and hoped they would also be able to travel and trade with the western nations in the future, indicating that commercial possibilities were perhaps foremost in the Senecas’ minds during the council.\textsuperscript{44} Quapaw chief He-ka-too also gave a brief speech in which he echoed the sentiments of the others. He addressed the Creeks, Choctaws, Osages, and Senecas as his “Old Brothers,” indicating that his people had long-time relationships with those groups, in contrast to the new friendships being formed with the plains Indians. The Quapaws, who He-Ka-too admitted were

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 415.  
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
greatly diminished in power and population, would follow the lead of the removed nations and be at peace with all.\textsuperscript{45}

This series of speeches took two days to complete. Afterward, Stokes and Arbuckle spent an entire day distributing presents, but only to the Comanches and the Wichitas. This surely created an awkward atmosphere, and may have contributed to the plains Indians’ perception of the United States government as weak, since it was able to provide so few gifts. When the council officially ended on August 27, the plains Indians headed west, accompanied by the Creek traders and some other members of the removed nations and the Osages who were going on a summer hunt.\textsuperscript{46} Despite the departure of most of the Comanches, Stokes and Arbuckle felt they had accomplished much at the council. Stokes proudly reported to Cass in a letter written in September 1835 that he could provide information that would clear up the confusion about “the names of the Nations of the Great Western Prairie.” According to Stokes there were “but three distinct Nations of these Indians; with the exception of one or two small tribes who reside far south of Red River, in the Province of Texas.” These three nations were the Comanches, Wichitas, and Kiowas, with the Comanches being the most important.\textsuperscript{47} The only other disappointing result of the conference was the departure of the Kiowas from the region (probably with the Comanches) before the council even began. Stokes and Arbuckle realized that it had

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 414.

\textsuperscript{46} ibid, pp. 416-18.

\textsuperscript{47} Stokes to Cass, September 15, 1835, Lewis Cass Collection, Western History Collection. Stokes also was finally able to clear up confusion about the term “Panis,” and “Pawnee,” which had been used to describe the Wichitas since the period of French exploration in Louisiana.
something to do with animosity between the Kiowas and the Osages, but they could not “fix the Charge [of scaring the Kiowa away] unequivocally” on the Osages who had been present.48

The commissioners sent messengers to track down the Kiowas and to extend an open invitation for them to visit Fort Gibson, receive the presents that had been reserved for them, and become part of the treaty.49 In December 1835, a Kiowa warrior arrived at Fort Gibson with a Wichita chief, indicating the Wichitas’ eagerness to include others in the treaty and solidify their renewed friendship with the Americans. Stokes and Arbuckle gave the Kiowa man some presents, seeming embarrassed that they had so little to offer, and tried to convince him to get all the Kiowa chiefs to come Fort Gibson for formal negotiations. If this meeting took place, Stokes believed that finally “all the Indian Nations of the South West” would be “in a state of peace and friendly intercourse.”50 In essence, he was correct, but that was because it was what the plains and removed Indians wanted, not because the federal government had managed a great diplomatic feat.

As Stokes came to realize in the remaining years of his service in Indian Territory, for federal officials there would always be just one more meeting or one more treaty that would supposedly “fix” the situation in the southwestern borderlands for good. At the council grounds at Camp Holmes in August 1835, the U.S. government had helped to create a working peace agreement between the nations of the southwestern borderlands, but federal officials did not

48 ibid. The Kiowas had left the council because they were not ready to make peace with the Osages, who had conducted a brutal raid on a Kiowa camp in May 1833. The Kiowas were devastated by the event, calling it “the summer they cut off their heads” in their winter counts. See Candace S. Greene, One Hundred Summers: A Kiowa Calendar Record (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 46-48 and Mildred P. Mayhall, The Kiowas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 147.


50 Stokes to Cass, December 8, 1835, Lewis Cass Collection.
realize what they had done. Agents in the West and officials in Washington could not see that peace and trade were actually what most of the Native people in the region wanted, and that they had all taken steps to achieve it. U.S. officials continued to act as though the region was in constant turmoil. Their arrogant assumptions about Indian “savagery” convinced them that the Plains Indians could be nothing but hostile toward Americans or to Natives who had adopted aspects of the American lifestyle. Rumors that fed those assumptions would regularly reach the ears of federal officials in the West, who usually reported them back to their superiors in Washington. Just a few months after the council, the Anglo-American population of Texas rebelled against Mexico, sending the southwestern frontier into turmoil as wild rumors about the attempts of both sides to involve local Native people in the conflict circulated constantly. Federal agents in Indian Territory were particularly concerned that both the Plains Indians and the removed nations would be drawn into the conflict.51 Their correspondence cluttered with such rumors, federal officials in Indian Territory and in Washington failed to realize the enormous success of the peace agreement that had been signed in August 1835. And those rumors mattered very much. As historian Gregory Evans Dowd has recently argued, “Groundless stories demand our regard” because they “both shaped and reflected perceptions on the colonial and early national frontiers.” Groundless stories certainly colored the actions of U.S. officials in the southwestern borderlands, more often than not clouding their perceptions of events occurring just

51 William Armstrong to C. A. Harris, 6 May 1836, LR-OIA, West. Sup., reel 921; William Armstrong to Elbert Herring, 13 May 1836, ibid; William Armstrong to Elbert Herring, 23 June 1836, ibid; William Armstrong to C. A. Harris, 20 April 1837, LR-OIA, West. Sup., reel 922.
outside their lines of sight. In Dowd’s words, “rumors have force because they match expectations, sometimes better than the authorized news that would dismiss them.”

Chapter 8
Trading Information: The Chouteau Brothers and Native Diplomacy

“They hoped [he] could give them some information of the steps the Government had taken relative to the depredations of the Pawnee Mohaws and Chians” - Tabaquena to A. P. Chouteau, June 1838

The treaty signed at Camp Holmes in August 1835 was a vastly important turning point in the relationships between the Osages and Comanches, as well as the relationships between removing groups, the plains groups, the Osages, and the Wichitas (the latter two groups do not fit quite so neatly into a “plains” or “removed” category). It was also reopened the door for American trade with the plains groups, which had become much less active by the beginning of the 1830s because of the arrival of the the removed groups, the decline of the fur trade, and the attraction of land in Texas. However, the treaty ultimately did little to change the relationship between the plains groups and the United States government. The fact that the federal government did not (or perhaps could not) see just how successful this treaty was in establishing amicable relationships between the varied groups of Indian Territory, is revealing of its weakness in the West and of the degree to which the preconceived notions that federal officials had about Indians clouded their ability to perceive the reality of the situation. Despite the fact that removal to Indian Territory was ongoing, the events that occurred in the five years after the signing of the Camp Holmes treaty are revealing of the U.S. government’s lack of control over and knowledge about the region where they were removing tens of thousands of Native people. Native nations remained in control of this borderlands space, significantly affecting the lives of the removing groups, but not in the negative ways that U.S. officials believed. Understanding the complicated events that unfolded between 1835 and 1840 is necessary for understanding how removing groups developed relationships with the Plains Indians that were totally outside the control (or
knowledge) of the United States, relationships that helped them economically as they tried to reestablish their sovereignty in new southwestern spaces.

In the month immediately following the signing of the treaty, the federal government remained optimistic that the situation in Indian Territory had finally been brought under some degree of control. However, federal officials in the West like Montfort Stokes and Matthew Arbuckle were still concerned about the situation because the Kiowas had not signed the treaty. Hoping to draw the Kiowas into the treaty and complete the last task that would fulfill the commissioners’ instructions to create peace on the southwestern frontier, in December 1835 Stokes issued instructions to P. L. Chouteau, A. P.’s brother and the long-time Osage agent, to go west in search of the Kiowas. The movements of the Chouteau brothers around the borderlands West in the three years following the signing of the Treaty of Camp Holmes are massively important. The reports sent back to Washington by the Chouteau brothers revealed not only how Native people perceived what had been accomplished at Camp Holmes, but also how the shifting contexts in the borderlands, especially the expansion of the Cheyennes and Arapahos into the central plains, affected those perceptions. Additionally, the Chouteau brothers’ reports further underscore the point that although it was brokered by U.S. representatives, the Treaty of Camp Holmes was mostly important as a moment for Native diplomatic and economic interaction and policy development. Native people still controlled the southwestern borderlands, and the actions that they took were circumscribed by their own needs. Americans were potentially useful allies, but the Plains Indians did not perceive either the Americans or the arrival of the removing Indians as an immediate problem. For the Native people who signed it, the Treaty of Camp
Holmes was about many different things, few of which were the things U.S. representatives thought that it was about.

In addition to the lack of Kiowa participation in the treaty, Stokes’s and Arbuckle’s optimism about what they had accomplished was further tempered in late December 1835, when a man named only as “Rains” arrived in Fort Gibson.\(^1\) Rains made a big splash at Fort Gibson, and his views seem to have also influenced Washington officials’ perceptions of the situation in the Southwest. Rains arrived at Fort Gibson, supposedly straight from Coffee’s post on the Red River with information “that the Comanches, with whom we made the treaty of the 24th of August last, had become dissatisfied and destroyed the Treaty by tearing it into pieces [sic] the Copy they were furnished with.” Additionally, the Comanches “had warned Mr. Coffee to leave the country,” which Rains believed indicated that the Comanches had become hostile to all Americans. When Stokes tried “to find out from Mr. Rains [the Comanches’] principal objections to the Treaty,” Rains was less forthcoming with information, although he claimed that they had been displeased with the amount and quality of the presents that they had been given at the meeting, and that they disliked that the treaty “had laid open their hunting ground, to our Friendly Indians who were killing up their game.” If these assertions were true, all of the commissioners’ efforts from the previous three years would have been in vain. The whole goal of the treaty from the perspective of U.S. officials had been to reconcile the plains Indians to the presence (and increasing presence in the future) of the removed Indians.

However, Stokes was somewhat suspicious of Rains and his motives, so in the December 29 letter to Cass reporting the rumors of the Comanches’ supposed hostility and displeasure with

\(^1\) Stokes only gave the man’s last name in his letter to Cass about the visit, but this was most likely A. J. Rains, who appears in several other documents related to American traders in the region.
the treaty, he also wrote “We have been informed since Mr. Rains left . . . that he had been much more communicative to others than he was to either of us, and that he had written a letter for publication at St. Louis, in which he very freely censures the conduct of the Commissioners . . . He has left here for Washington and we understand with the intention of making some statements in relation to the management of Indian Affairs; probably with the object of getting into business.” It seemed clear to Stokes that Rains had his own reasons for spreading the rumors about the Comanches—and for some reason his was dissatisfied with the work of the commissioners. After asking around Fort Gibson about Rains, Stokes learned that the man’s character was “not free from censure, and his conduct while here was not calculated to do away [with] unfavorable suspicions.” P. L. Chouteau’s report, Stokes hoped, would reveal what was really happening on the plains and possibly debunk or explain the rumors being spread by Rains.

It is unclear exactly when P. L. Chouteau departed west in search of the Kiowas. The letter that he wrote to the commissioners from the Creek Nation on April 19, 1836 describes a journey of several months, so he probably departed sometime in January 1836. P. L.’s first stop was at the trading house of Coffee and Colville, which was still in operation on the Red River. He was surprised to find that the Plains Indians had not been in to trade since the previous spring. In fact, Holland Coffee himself had just returned to the post when P. L. arrived, having been out on an ultimately failed search to find the plains Indians and bring them in for trading. It is unclear why no Indians had come to Coffee’s post since the previous spring, and Coffee had clearly become concerned about the viability of his business. This was the first hint that the

2 Stokes to Cass, December 29, 1835, Lewis Cass Collection.

3 If this was indeed the case, and P.L. had no reason to lie about it, then A. J. Raines’ story about the Comanche chief tearing up his copy of the treaty was certainly a fabrication.
Plains Indians, while welcoming American trade, had other important concerns and problems to deal with. They still operated on their own schedules, not those of American traders or government officials. It is also possible that the Creek traders who had accompanied them back west after the August 1835 treaty had fully supplied their needs. Significantly though, if Coffee was telling P. L. the truth, and it seems he had no reason to lie, the report that the Plains Indians had not been to his post since the spring of 1835 debunked Rains’s story about the Comanche chief tearing up the treaty as an expression of his dissatisfaction. Whether Rains was lying or repeating an untruth he had no way of knowing was true or false, however, remains unclear.4

But while he was at Coffee’s post, P. L. learned from the trader that some Wichitas encamped on the “Cache river about 65 miles above the trading house” might have information regarding the whereabouts of the Kiowas. Delayed by bad weather, when P. L. finally arrived in the area, he found only the signs of a recent Wichita camp, but no Wichitas. So we wandered on, finally stumbling across a band of Wacos (and possibly some Tawakonis), whom he described as being “from Texas.” He stayed with this group for three days to rest his horses, where he learned that the Camp Holmes council was already beginning to affect Native actions in the southwest. For decades the Wichitas had suffered from Osage raids on their Red River villages; finally getting a peace settlement with the Osages had been one of the primary Wichita goals during the treaty meeting, and the Wichita bands clearly believed that this goal had been accomplished at Camp Holmes in 1835. The Wacos that P. L. met in the winter of 1836 were on their way back to “the country formerly inhabited by them, and from which they had been expelled by the Osages

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—some years hence when at war with them.”5 The Waco group planned to settle and plant corn about 40 miles east of some other Wichita villages, probably the ones that Colonel Dodge’s expedition had visited in 1834. Significantly, the Wacos told P. L. that they planned for their newly reestablished village to be “on a direct line from Fort Gibson,” indicating their desire for trade and diplomatic connections to the closest American outpost in the southwest.

When the Wacos learned that P. L. was looking for the Kiowas to invite them to Fort Gibson, the Wacos immediately asked “whether they would be permitted to visit Fort Gibson in company of the Kioways.” They were clearly looking for yet another opportunity to solidify their new amicable relationships with the Osages and other groups in the region like the Kiowas, who would be valuable trade partners, especially because of the Kiowas’ well-known connections to the Comanches. Additionally, not all of the Wichita bands had been present for the 1835, and those who had not were eager to indicate their desire to abide by the treaty’s terms. P. L. said he was sure that the Wacos would be welcome at Fort Gibson because they planned to make “their permanent establishment within the territory of the United States,” indicating both he and the Wacos anticipated interacting with U.S. officials far into the future.6

P. L. then proceeded to some other Wichita villages that the Wacos had told him about. He was welcomed by the Wichitas there, (probably Taovayas) but he still found no Kiowas. However, he learned that his best bet for finding the Kiowas at that time of year was to go

5 P. L. Chouteau to Matthew Arbuckle and Montfort Stokes, April 19, 1836, Lewis Cass Collection.

6 P. L. would probably learn upon his return (if he didn’t know before he left) that several small bands of Wichitas had visited Fort Gibson since the signing of the treaty at Camp Holmes. Arbuckle did not seem to view the visitors as unwelcome, and in fact he went so far as to request permission from the Adjutant General to hire a semi-permanent interpreter of the Wichita language to live at the post. He felt hiring a Wichita interpreter would be the most economical, because the Comanches and many of the other prairie Indians also understood the Wichita language. See Matthew Arbuckle to the Adjutant General, February 16, 1836, LR-OIA, West. Sup. Roll #921.
southwest, and so P. L. and his small group of companions roamed between the Red and Colorado rivers for twenty-two days in the coldest part of winter on the southern plains. He found no Kiowas, or anyone else. His horses nearly perished from lack of grass, a circumstance that eventually “compelled” him to give up the search and start back to the Wichita villages near Cache River. However, as soon as he gave up the search and turned northeast, he found what he had sought. P. L. wrote “I found myself surrounded by innumerable fires of the Comanches, Kioways, & Cah-tak-cah’s,” who were returning from their winter quarters to the South.  

The condition of his horses forced P. L. to continue on to the Wichita villages he had visited some weeks before. Pasture was scarce, and he could not share space with the massive Comanche and Kiowa camps. However, having made contact with the Kiowas, P. L. regularly “sent . . . messengers to notify the Indians of the nature of my business.” Eventually, as weather conditions improved, he “began to have visits from many individuals of, each of the nations already mentioned.” However, the Kiowas were very slow and deliberate in their proceedings once they discovered who P. L. was and what his goals were. The first visitors at his camp were ones that P. L. described as not “of any distinction.” They were waiting for the arrival of their principal chiefs and took time “to reflect” upon P. L.’s invitation to go Fort Gibson before holding any official meetings with him. Eventually, the Kiowas tentatively agreed to meet P. L. at Fort Gibson in early May because “[t]he time could not be ascertained with any very great degree of precision because of the absence of the other Chief whose decision would on his return to the village, influence their movements.” This other great chief was delayed by “the poverty of 

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7 These are probably the Kiowa-Apaches or Plains Apaches, as they are sometimes known.

8 The Kiowas had a more centralized political structure than their allies the Comanche and Wichita, partly as a result of their much smaller numbers. See Mayhall, *The Kiowas*, pp. 124-25.
the horses and mules that he was then bringing with him from [afar],” but the Kiowas promised “that the time of their arrival at Fort Gibson would not in any event be materially distant from that I have mentioned.”

While discussing the future meeting at Fort Gibson, P. L. was also visited often by Comanches, who spent most of their visits complaining about bands of Delawares that roamed the western regions of Indian Territory. It is unclear when these Delawares broke away from other western Delaware groups, who were known to be living on a reservation in Kansas and also in Texas at the time. The fact that the Comanches complained about the Delawares is interesting, as U.S. officials who came to Indian Territory in subsequent decades noted that the Comanches got on particularly well with the Delawares, who were often recommended as the best guides for any party passing through the region. The main issue causing trouble in early 1836 was that the Delawares had “wantonly and without cause whatsoever killed one of their [the Comanches’] principal men.” At least this was the Comanche side of the story. The death of one of their leading men at the hands of the Delawares also led the Comanches to complain about the Delawares’ hunting in territory that they believed to be solely their own.

Significantly, the Delawares were not participants in the Treaty of Camp Holmes. By signing that document, the Comanches had indicated their willingness to share hunting grounds, but not with people who they perceived as murderers or with whom they had no peace agreement. The Comanche chiefs also complained to P. L. about “one Choctaw and two Quapaw who have committed a robbery on three lodges of the Comanches, to the amount of 22 horses

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and mules.” Representatives of both the Choctaws and the Quapaws had signed the recent treaty. At some point, the Comanches may have learned that the federal government considered the Delawares to be fully under their supervision because of all the treaties that the U.S. had signed with the Delawares over the previous decades. Therefore, the Comanches “claim[ed] the interference of the Government of the United States” to do something about the Delawares, just as the Comanches claimed “restitution of the property” that had allegedly been stolen by the Choctaws and Quapaws. The Comanches assured P. L. that “they wish[ed] to conform to the Treaty of last year in all its parts,” but said that they would have to take matters into their own hands if the federal government did not play the mediator role that the Comanches had come to expect after the treaty.

P. L. sought confirmation of these accusations from Holland Coffee, who verified them.\(^\text{10}\) Believing that such assurances would be approved by the commissioners, P. L. promised the Comanches that he would personally inform the commissioners of their complaints against the Delawares, Choctaws, and Quapaws, and that he would return from Fort Gibson to the West to give the Comanches the response of the commissioners in person.\(^\text{11}\) In the conclusion of his letter, P. L. made sure to mention that all the Plains Indians he met gave him “uniformly kind attentions” and had a “respectful bearing . . . seeming never for a moment to forget the courtesy due to an agent of the [government].” For P. L., this probably seemed like a necessary addition, since he was confirming that there was some level of dissatisfaction among the Comanches. But

\(^{10}\) P. L. Chouteau to Stokes and Arbuckle, April 19, 1836, Lewis Cass Collection. There is no totally valid reason to be suspicious of Coffee’s confirmation of these reports, but his business was clearly dependent on the Comanches continuing to come in to trade with him, so it was quite unlikely that he would question any story of Delaware or Choctaw depredations that they told him about.

\(^{11}\) P. L. Chouteau to Stokes and Arbuckle, April 25, 1836, Lewis Cass Collection.
importantly, it was not about the treaty itself that the Comanches were dissatisfied. Rather, they were frustrated that the United States did not seem to be keeping up its end of the bargain, and were politely asking P. L. to ensure that something was done to make sure violations of the treaty did not continue occurring.

On April 29, 1836 William Armstrong forwarded P. L.’s report to Washington, writing that “everything indicates peace and [friendship], on the frontier. Armstrong mentioned that some possible clashes between hunting parties were likely to occur, but he did not seem too concerned that this would upset the entire region. He, Stokes, and Arbuckle were planning for the arrival of a Kiowa delegation. The usually stingy commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring had even agreed to appropriate an additional $500 for the commissioners to purchase additional presents to give to the Kiowas. However, Armstrong’s opinion that the situation in the southwest was calm would soon be deeply influenced by rumors about activities in Texas related to the uprising of white American settlers there against the Mexican government. Virtually nothing has been written by historians that describes the impact of the Texas Revolution on Indian Territory, the implementation of removal policies there, and how that war influenced federal officials’ perceptions of the stability of that region. Yet the Texas Revolution was massively important to Armstrong’s perception of his ability to carry out his duties in Indian Territory and preserve the peace that he initially believed he had achieved through the treaty at Camp Holmes.

Turmoil in Texas was also the most likely reason that the Comanches had begun having problems with the Delawares in early 1836. During and after the main military action involved in

12 Stokes to Herring, March 6, 1836, Lewis Cass Collection; Armstrong to Herring, April 29, 1836, Lewis Cass Collection.
the Texas Revolution, many eastern Native groups who had sought refuge there from the
dominationist United States and its Indian policies realized that Texas was becoming a dangerous
place. At various times both the Mexican government and the white American rebels attempted
to recruit Indian allies for their causes, but making the wrong decision could leave a group very
vulnerable. Then, once the rebels had achieved victory, many groups, even those who had
supported the winning side, realized that Native people were not welcome in the Texas Republic.
Some groups seem to have gone further south and west so that they could remain in Mexico. But
many others went north, into the fertile hunting regions of western Indian Territory. Reports from
U.S. federal agents among the Choctaws and Creeks indicate that groups of Shawnees,
Delawares, and Kickapoos were arriving in western Indian Territory during this period, the
majority probably coming north from Texas. The Texas Revolution would also lead to the arrival
of more Creeks in Indian Territory after the new president of Texas, Sam Houston, rejected the
attempts of Creeks who remained east of the Mississippi to purchase land in Texas instead of
removing to Indian Territory.

Over time, Armstrong and other U.S. officials in the West would receive many reports
about these new arrivals to Indian Territory. However, more reports would come directly from
Texas with rumors that local Native groups were colluding with one side or the other, leading
Armstrong and others to fear that those conflicts would spill over into Indian Territory. For
example, in May 1836, Armstrong received a report from General Edmund P. Gains, who had
been put in charge of the U.S. military in the Southwest in response to disturbances in Texas.
Nervous about the explosive nature of the situation there, Gains requested backup from the
troops stationed at Fort Gibson, asking that they be moved to Fort Towson, which was in the
Choctaw Nation on the Red River, the border between Indian Territory and Texas. Armstrong’s tone indicates serious concern that the removal of troops from Fort Gibson would leave the Americans exposed to potentially angry removed Indians and to the Plains Indians as well. If, as rumors indicated, the Mexican government was trying desperately to recruit all the Indian allies that it could to fight against the American rebels in Texas, U.S. officials worried that the situation could get out of hand quickly. Less than a month before, on April 15, 1836, Armstrong had written to Herring to debunk the wild rumors that were spreading that Coffee and Colville had been murdered by the Comanches, reiterating that all was well and urging caution when hearing fantastic reports that American traders had been killed. But by May, when Gaines’ report and request for backup arrived, Armstrong was becoming less sure of his own assurances that everything in the region was fine.

Armstrong wrote a letter to Harris on the same day (May 6, 1836) that he had written to Herring, expressing his concerns about the possible trouble that could come from transferring U.S. troops from Fort Gibson to Fort Towson, writing “The moveing of such a number of United States troops through the Indian country will naturally incite the apprehensions of the Indians.” He was also concerned “that there were some Creeks, Cherokees, Shawnees, Delawares, and a few Choctaws that were in Texas, [who had fled to Indian Territory] the apprehension is that they will join the Mexicans and induce others to unite with them.” Armstrong hoped that when P. L. Chouteau arrived with the Kiowas, he would be able to get more concrete information about the situation, because like almost all U.S. officials at the time, he connected the apparent actions of

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13 Armstrong to Herring, May 6, 1836, Lewis Cass Collection.
14 Armstrong to Herring, April 15, 1836, West. Sup, Roll #921.
the plains Indians to what was occurring in Texas, focusing on reports that Mexican emissaries
were trying to recruit all Indians to war against the Americans, ignoring the fact that there were
other events hundreds of miles away on the plains that were just as important to the plains
Indians at that time as what was occurring in Texas.\textsuperscript{15}

In June, Armstrong was still jittery, writing that although “to all appearances” things were
quiet, he could not rule out that trouble was on the horizon because he perceived “a general
restlessness among the Indians.” He also feared that the anticipated arrival of more Creeks and
Seminoles, who were finally being forcibly removed from their homes in the South, would make
the situation even more complicated. Assuredly angry at the United States and white Americans
in general, Armstrong assumed recently removed Indians would be the perfect target for the
Mexican emissaries he feared were wandering around the West spurring Native people to
violence. In Armstrong’s letters from the summer of 1836, one can see a man who went from
trying to rationally navigate rumors to a man who more often than not got caught up in those
rumors.\textsuperscript{16}

Meanwhile, instead of fear, the Chouteau brothers saw opportunities to develop trade
connections in the volatile borderlands. Since so many Native groups from the region had been
willing to come to the Camp Holmes site, (which A. P. called Camp Mason in reference to
Richard Barnes Mason, who had originally selected the site) A. P. recognized an opportunity to
build a new trading post. Thus a few months after the conclusion of the treaty meeting, A. P. had
sent workers out to the site to construct some permanent buildings. He also applied for a license

\textsuperscript{15} Armstrong to Harris, May 6, 1836, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #921.

\textsuperscript{16} Armstrong to Herring, June 23, 1836, West. Sup. Roll #921.
to trade with the plains Indians and bid for a government contract to supply the removing Creeks and Seminoles, but he lost out to the Baltimore-based firm S. Reardon and Son. Chouteau continued to see significant potential in the region, realizing that the arrival of so many Native groups in the region and the establishment of friendly relations with the Plains Indians also provided multiple opportunities to make a lot of money.

However, Armstrong and other federal officials continued to only see problems. The Kiowas had never arrived in May as they had promised. In his annual report for 1836, written on October 1, Armstrong had finally gotten an idea about why the Kiowas had not come to Fort Gibson through information that he had probably obtained from the Chouteau brothers. Armstrong told Harris that “The Kioways have been expected at Fort Gibson for some time, but owing to the war that is said to be between them and some of the other wild tribes, they have failed to come.” Armstrong did not know what war the Kiowas had become involved in, but the Chouteau brothers would soon be able to provide more details. In the meantime, the Kiowas “promised however to be in about, the time that leaves fall.” Yet the rest of 1836 passed by, and no Kiowas arrived at Fort Gibson for a treaty meeting with the United States. P. L. had gone back east to attend to other concerns, including his duties as the Osage subagent, although by this time it was clear that his heart was no longer in the job, and he was focused instead on developing his brother’s trading ventures. The fact that the Kiowas had yet to arrive was becoming quite well-known, and other U.S. officials in the West began volunteering to try bringing the Kiowas in, arrogantly believing they could just go find the Kiowas and insist that they come to Fort

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17 See documents on West. Sup. Roll #921, many are undated, and there are no image numbers.

18 Armstrong to Harris, October 1, 1836, West. Sup. Roll #921.
If the treaty signed at Camp Holmes in 1835 had proved anything, it was that federal policy initiatives in the borderlands southwest remained subservient to Native diplomatic and economic goals. When those Native goals happened to align with the federal governments goals, meetings, treaties, and other agreements happened; when other concerns occupied the time and energy of Native people in the southwestern borderlands, U.S. officials and their policies would have to wait.

Armstrong’s fears seemed confirmed in another report from P. L. in February 1837. By that time P. L. had returned again to Camp Mason, learning that while he had been gone on other business “this place had been visited by the Comanche chief She-co-ney with a small party of his tribe.” It is very possible that this was Ichacoly, who had signed the August 1835 treaty. The Comanche leader had arrived “manifesting much anger; and declaring a determination to be revenged on the whites, for many supposed injuries received by them since and commencing at the time of the Council held with them at this place, in 1835.” This was Armstrong’s worst nightmare. It seems important to note that She-co-ney was angry that provisions he believed had been part of the treaty were not being properly enforced, echoing sentiments expressed by the Comanches to P. L. the previous winter. The Comanche leader told Chouteau that he was angry with “the whites,” but was that because there were white settlers or hunters encroaching on Comanche territory? Or was it because the Americans had still failed to observe all the treaty provisions as the Comanches expected?

In the same letter, P. L. reported that She-co-ney’s band had clashed with some Shawnees and Delawares near Camp Mason, so those groups obviously continued to be part of the

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19 Captain Hugh Bonneville to the Adjutant General, January 24, 1837, West. Sup., Roll #922.
problem. A nearby Waco group (possibly the ones P. L. himself had met traveling north from Texas to reestablish their old villages) had interfered with the Comanches to get them to spare the lives of the Delawares that they had fought with. When P. L. sent his son Edward west after the Comanche leader and his group, it was also a Wichita group who warned Edward against going all the way to She-co-ney’s camp because the chief was very angry. Edward took their advice and returned to Camp Mason. Once there, Edward learned that local Delawares were gathering up their people for mutual defense, expecting an attack from the angry Comanche leader. P. L. took this as a sign that there was “little doubt” war was coming.  

However, the Wacos and other Wichita bands, who had a vested interest in tranquility in the region, may have been the connection that the Delawares and Shawnees eventually used to smooth over their relationships with the Comanches. Because that process happened totally outside the view of U.S. officials, we know virtually nothing about it. But it must have happened, because not only were no more complaints about these groups recorded by the Chouteau brothers or other U.S. officials, but soon thereafter the Delawares were reported to be hunting and trading regularly with the Comanches and were considered some of the Comanches’ closest allies on their eastern borders. Additionally, it made sense that these Delawares and Shawnees would not appeal to U.S. representatives for help, because getting away from the federal government and its responsibility.

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20 One other possible source of the Comanche leaders’ displeasure could have been related to the Pawnees. All the evidence indicates that during this period, the Pawnees had resumed their raids on the Comanches, Wichitas, and other plains groups in the southwest. Although the Treaty of Camp Holmes had not been signed by the Pawnees, the implication of the treaty was that the Comanches were to be at peace with all the Indian nations with whom the U.S. government had treaties with. This would have included the Pawnees, who had multiple treaties with the U.S., including the land cession treaty that Henry Ellsworth had obtained in 1833. If the Comanches had ever mentioned the Pawnees to the right U.S. official, they might have been told that the U.S. considered the Pawnees to be under federal protection, which also meant federal responsibility. If Pawnee raids were increasing, the Comanches might have expected the U.S. to do something about it. However, because it was the Delawares and Shawnees that the Comanches specifically complained about, trouble with the Pawnees as a motivation for Comanche complaints can only be speculative.
Indian policies had been one of the main reasons for their early movement west of the Mississippi and eventually into Texas. Even though the U.S. claimed control over Indian Territory, Native diplomacy continued totally outside of federal knowledge and control because Native nations maintained sovereign spaces.

By February 13, 1837, Armstrong had received P. L.’s letter and was preparing to forward it to Washington. He believed that “[t]he present was a very critical time in our Indian affairs on this frontier,” and he again believed “a general Indian war” was on the horizon. However, Armstrong recognized that the presence of the Shawnees and Delawares in central Indian Territory was potentially the crux of the problem. He told the Chouteau brothers to inform the Shawnees and Delawares in no uncertain terms that the United States considered them to be intruders, and that they should “repair to their own country” because “they are considered the best warriors amongst the Indians; and are disposed to war.” Matthew Arbuckle also wrote from Fort Gibson about the reports of pending hostilities. Arbuckle did not put nearly as much stock in such reports as Armstrong did, but the fact that he sent them certainly colored eastern military officials’ perceptions of the situation in the southwest.

When he explained the situation to Harris, Armstrong wrote that the root of the problem was that the Comanches “begin to understand that other tribes claim and exercise ownership over the land.” He thought that if the Comanches were upset by the presence of a few “rogue” Shawnee and Delaware bands, then they were surely irritated by the presence of the Choctaws and Creeks, who the federal government had given ownership of the land where the Delawares

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21 Armstrong to P. L. Chouteau, February 13, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.

22 Arbuckle to Jones, Jan. 3, 1837, West. Sup., Roll #922.
and Shawnees were squatting. He believed that for the Comanches, the situation had begun to “[produce] a feeling of revenge.” However, Armstrong was simply making an assumption. He overlooked the very important fact that the Creeks, Choctaws, or Cherokees had not been mentioned in any of the reports from the Chouteaus as the cause of the Comanches’ complaints. Armstrong also wrote again that he hoped more information could be gleaned about the situation if the Kiowas finally came to Fort Gibson for a treaty council, as they had been promising since the previous spring.23

Armstrong sent that report to commissioner of Indian affairs Carey A. Harris, which was an important fact, because one of the next letters about these issues that came from Washington was addressed to A. P. Chouteau by Joel Poinsett, the secretary of war, indicating that some of the informational disconnect likely came from the fact that information coming from the West often only reached certain people in Washington. Poinsett wrote to A. P. on April 7, 1837 that he had received reports from Armstrong and other federal officials in the region “of murders committed by the Comanche Indians upon our own citizens.” Poinsett had either not read the letters coming from the southwest very carefully, or he had not read them at all, perhaps because many of them were not addressed to him. Poinsett and other secretaries of war often got information about Indian affairs second-hand, in reports from the commissioner of Indian affairs. Despite John C. Calhoun’s attempts in the 1820s to reform the structure of the federal government’s administration of Indian affairs, it was still an incredibly complicated system with no clear chain of command. The Chouteau brothers usually reported to William Armstrong, the superintendent of Indian affairs for the southwestern region, but sometimes they reported directly

23 Armstrong to Harris, February 13, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.
to the secretary of war and the commissioner of Indian affairs. The brothers also corresponded often with Matthew Arbuckle, who also regularly received reports from Armstrong. The situation was made even more complicated by the ongoing implementation of removals. The logistics of keeping up with all the correspondence coming from across the continent was a nightmare, as demonstrated by Poinsett’s lack of accurate information.

Pointsett told A. P. that he had “been selected . . . to ascertain the causes and extent of this hostile feeling, and if possible, allay it and prevent its infecting other Indians.” Poinsett then claimed to have read A. P.’s February report about She-co-ney’s complaints against the United States, and was even so kind as to forward a copy of the 1835 treaty to A. P., so that it could be used in his investigation to determine if the Comanches had any legitimate cause for complaint against the United States. At least Poinsett was giving the Comanches the benefit of the doubt, even though the murder of white American citizens by Comanches was not at all the problem facing the southwestern borderlands at the time. Poinsett, though misinformed, was interested in accuracy, writing “You will endeavor to trace these reports to their sources, with a view to determine their accuracy.”

Pointsett did not mention the Shawnees and Delawares, writing instead that if “the Comanches are dissatisfied, because the Creeks and Choctaws have extended their occupation and improvements to the country heretofore used by themselves as a hunting ground” then A. P. was to explain to the Comanches that they were just going to have to deal with it, because “the United States having purchased these lands from the tribes, has guaranteed the exclusive right in it to the emigrated Indians.” Poinsett also missed the point that the territory where the Choctaws

24 Joel Poinsett to A. P. Chouteau, April 7, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.
and Creeks were developing settlements was well east of the region the Comanches considered to be their hunting grounds. The Comanches had rarely ever ventured east of the Cross Timbers, and would probably never have done so to hunt. Creeks and Choctaws who had participated in the treaty were welcome on the hunting grounds of western Indian Territory, especially if they had trade goods, as the encounters at Camp Holmes indicated the Creeks likely did when they went west. Delawares and Shawnees, who were not participants in the treaty and probably had few trade goods, were not. Unfortunately, Poinsett did not realize this important fact.

Before A. P. probably received Pointsett’s April letter, Armstrong received more news from P. L. that further illuminated the situation. P. L. had sent a man named Jack Ivey (who he described as “a half breed mulatto”) out to meet with the Comanches, seeking further information. Ivey returned with a report that the Comanches were divided into two groups: one friendly to the Americans and the other, probably She-co-ney’s band, which was hostile. Ivey attributed the hostile group’s feelings to the presence of Spanish emissaries among them who had tried to stir up hatred for all Americans, but given the reality of the situation, this seems unlikely, an assumption prompted by other prejudices about the Comanches and their inherent savageness. However, it would soon become clear that the pro-American faction among the Comanches was much stronger, and She-co-ney was an outlier. The friendly leader that Ivey met, who was probably Tabaquena, proposed a meeting with all the local Native groups at Camp Mason in October 1837, where they could work out their differences. This friendly Comanche leader also told Ivey that the source of their trouble was that they had “received much injury from the Pawnie Nahahws Delawares and other tribes.” But if U.S. officials would agree to facilitate another meeting at the previous treaty site, “all difficulties could be settled and a permanent
peace established,” much like the one that had been established with the Osages and the removed groups at Camp Holmes in 1835. There are also indications that the Comanches were possibly interested in the U.S. serving as an intermediary in their conflict with the Cheyennes and Arapahos. Interestingly, P. L. also mentioned in this May 1837 report that there were some Delawares in the region who were trading horses with the Comanches, indicating further that Comanche displeasure with the Delawares may have been isolated to She-co-ney’s group, or that there was some factionalism among the Delawares of the region, and it was only some of them who had upset a few Comanches.25

P. L. sent the letter describing these circumstances on May 22 from Fort Gibson. He had departed for that location on May 8 with some Kiowas to make the long-awaited treaty council between the Kiowas and the Americans come to fruition. Armstrong wrote to Harris about the Kiowas’ arrival on May 28, 1837. He confirmed that a peace treaty had been signed and that A. P. and Stokes had been at Fort Gibson for the occasion. Armstrong also confirmed that there was a plan for A. P. “to meet the wild tribes near Camp Mason about the first of October and those that were in will give the news to the different Prairie tribes.” At the time, A. P. planned to stay in the Fort Gibson region until September, when he planned to go back to Fort Mason with Armstrong.26

Stokes also wrote back to Washington about the Kiowa treaty, which he was quite clearly very proud to have been involved in accomplishing. However, Stokes wrote directly to Joel Poinsett, perhaps having heard about Poinsett’s misunderstanding of the situation in the

26 Armstrong to Harris, May 28, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.
southwest. Stokes debunked all of the rumors, writing “I would beg liberty to state that unfounded reports have (by some means) been made to the War Dept., as appears from your instructions to Col. Chouteau, relative to murders and depredations committed (as it is alleged) by the Comanche’s and their associated Bands. The [new?] Marshall, a Trader, said to have been killed, is alive and in this Country. And Deputations from all four of the Principal Bands of Osages, were here at the Treaty a few days past: No Osage woman has been either killed or Captured since the Treaty with the Comanche and Wichita’s in August 1835.”

Also during 1837, reports from military officials in the region downplayed the danger and cautioned federal officials in D.C. not to believe all the rumors. A report by Captain John Stuart, who was in charge of Fort Coffee was designed “to give correct information relative to the character and condition of the Indians. By so doing he hoped to allay the fears entertained by many white persons.” Stuart was aware that some people would object to his claim that the Indians had “friendly feelings . . . towards the whites,” and he warned that “There will no doubt be many whose pecuniary interest will prompt them to endeavor to refute the statements of Capt. Stuart upon this subject. There are many individuals who would, if possible, induce you, as well as every one else connected with Government, to believe that there was great danger of Indian hostility on this frontier.”

Another report from Lieutenant Colonel William Whistler at Fort Gibson in July 1837 stated that “reports refered to by W. Armstrong have not been confirmed, and appear to have been without foundation.” Whistler mentioned the recent treaty council with the Kiowas and

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27 Stokes to Poinsett, May 30, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.

28 W. A. M. Brooke to Harris, enclosing Stuart’s report from Fort Coffee, November 15, 1837, LR-OIA, West. Sup. Roll #922.
other plains groups, during which the Americans’ encounters with the Plains Indians had been nothing but pleasant. Based on this fact, he found the rumors about the Plains Indians’ hostility much more difficult to believe. Therefore he cautioned that “little reliance can be placed upon the reports of Indian hunters and traders, who return from the prairies to the West; they are easily alarmed, and are misled by their fears.”

In September 1837, A. P. wrote to Harris that he accepted the responsibility of gathering a delegation of Plains Indians to go to Washington. However, he was still in Fort Gibson and planned to remain there for some time, because he had received intelligence that it would be better to meet the plains groups at Camp Mason in December. On the same day, A. P. and Stokes also wrote a joint letter to Harris, explaining more details of the Kiowa treaty that had been signed in May, and assuring Harris that “perfect peace and Friendship now exists between the United States and all the Nations and Tribes within the Superintendency of the South Western Frontier, and between all these nations and Tribes among themselves.” Stokes and A. P. also told Harris what they viewed as the real cause of the recent issues in the region, writing that the “Pawnees of the Platte” were known to be stealing horses from the Osages, Kiowas, and Comanches, and that this was creating a very bad feeling among those groups. As Stokes and A. P. noted, the U.S. government had treaties with those Pawnees, but that the Pawnees had not been part of the 1835 treaty, implying that if they had, perhaps the present difficulties would not exist.

29 Lieutenant Colonel William Whistler to [recipient unclear; letter on this roll may have been a copy], July 15, 1837, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #922.

30 A. P. Chouteau to Harris, September 8, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.

31 A. P. Chouteau and Montfort Stokes to Harris, September 8, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.
In November 1837, A. P. wrote to Harris again, but from Camp Mason. After arriving, A. P. had sent this brother out to see if the hoped-for meeting of the various plains tribes would take place in December. A. P. also hoped at that time to gather a group to go to Washington. However, P. L. had returned with the disappointing news that nothing of the sort could be accomplished until the spring of 1838 at the earliest because the plains groups were “scattered over a vast extent of country, and [they were] almost all at war.” A. P. assumed that the conflict in Texas had instigated conflict out on the plains, but based on the evidence currently available, the brutal attacks by the Cheyennes and Arapahos from the north were probably the real cause of the Comanches and Kiowas being scattered over the plains and unavailable to engage in other diplomatic efforts. The crisis that they faced from the north was too great. A. P. should have realized that the threat from the north was the real problem. Camp Mason itself had been recently suffered from a series of raids by the Pawnee Mohaws, who were getting ever more bold in their attacks. Just a few days later, A. P. wrote again, saying a group of desperate Wichitas had arrived at Camp Mason, their villages entirely destroyed by Pawnee raiders. This band of Wichitas had suffered greatly from disease during the previous summer, and the attack by the Pawnees raiders was too much for them to handle. They begged A. P. for any assistance with food or weapons that he could provide. Feeling immense pity, A. P. gave them what he could, knowing he might not ever be reimbursed by the federal government for the expense.

Two days later, A. P. wrote again. Clearly the word of his return to the post had spread quickly in the region, attracting the attention of local Native groups who believed that he could

32 A. P. Chouteau to Harris, November 25, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.
33 A. P. Chouteau to Harris, December 8, 1837, Lewis Cass Collection.
help them. Delawares came to complain about horse thefts, but more importantly, Comanche leader Tabaquena came as well, providing yet more information about the Comanches’ perspective on the 1835 treaty and their subsequent political problems. He reported that some young Osage men had been breaking the treaty and were stealing horses from the Comanches. Tabaquena told A. P. that “the Comanches cannot suffer these injuries to go unnoticed, but as they have been for some time on the most amicable terms with the Osages, and wish to continue so, and as they believe the perpetrators to be lawless persons of that nation . . . he accordingly visited me for the purpose of asking my advice.” Tabaquena was seeking an outside mediator, a representative of the United States who had helped to broker peace between the two nations in the first place, and a man that many of the Osages also clearly held in high regard. There were Osage leaders in the region that A. P. discussed the situation with. As usual, they claimed to have no control over the young men, but provided the possibly helpful, but rather outrageous suggestion that A. P. arrest the Osage perpetrators and take them to Fort Gibson where they would be made to ride wooden horses all day as punishment. During the same short period, A. P. reported that some Kiowas also came to Camp Mason and asked for American medals and flags.

By the summer of 1838, however, A. P. had achieved a clearer picture of the situation, writing perhaps one of his most important letters to Harris from Camp Mason on June 28, 1838. After Tabaquena had come into Camp Mason in December 1837, A. P. had asked the Comanche leader to be an emissary, and speak with the other plains nations about gathering delegations to go on a trip to Washington. Tabaquena was probably more suited to the job than A. P., not only because of his connections as a Comanche leader, but because A. P.’s health was in serious decline by that time. In June, Tabaquena finally returned with an impressive array of potential
delegates. He came with Kiowas, Wichitas, Shoshones, and representatives from many (possibly all) of the Comanche bands. There is no mention that the recalcitrant She-co-ney came with the delegation. It seems clear that the Comanches had begun consolidating politically, because there was no mention of any of the problems that She-co-ney had complained about the previous year. And this time they were upfront with Chouteau about the threats that they were facing. First, they told A. P. that they would pledge to return to Camp Mason in October “when they hoped [he] could give them, some information of the steps the Government had taken relative to the depredations of the Pawnee Mohaw and Chians.”

This was the first time that the name “Cheyenne” was actually written down in one of these letters explaining the source of the Comanches’ troubles. The Comanches told A. P. that they and their Osage allies “were making preparations to go to war . . . against the Pawnee Mohaws and Cheyennes.” A. P. replied that he had told federal officials about their complaints against those tribes, although none of his available letters indicate that he mentioned those particular tribes by name, but he had not yet received any instructions about what to do. A. P. urged them not to go to war, and he wrote that they agreed, but this gesture was probably only to appease him. Buying time, A. P. sent his nephew Edward out with some of the group to Comanche and Kiowa camps that were about 175 miles to the northwest, near what is present-day Fort Supply, Oklahoma. The camps there were large and spread out for miles. But when Edward and the rest of the party found the camps, all they saw was devastation. Most of the men had gone out hunting, probably in preparation for the planned war expedition against their northern neighbors. While gone, the camps had been attacked. Hundreds of horses were stolen, at

34 A. P. Chouteau to Carey A. Harris, June 28, 1838, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #922. [emphasis mine]
least 43 men killed, and many women and children had been taken captive. The attack spanned Comanche and Kiowa camps upwards of fifty miles apart.

This brutal raid was conducted in response to the slaughter the previous year of forty-two Cheyenne Bowstring warriors, a military society within the Cheyenne nation, and the capture of their sacred medicine arrows. The loss of the Bowstring warriors and the arrows was devastating, leading the Cheyennes to call on their Arapaho allies to aid them in revenge. Prior to the deaths of the Bowstring warriors in 1837, much of the conflict between the Cheyennes and the Comanches had involved more intermittent horse stealing raids than it did pitched battles with dozens of casualties. Known to historians as the Battle of Wolf Creek, the attack by the Cheyennes and Arapahoes on the Comanche and Kiowa camps in the spring of 1838 was one of the most significant events in the history of the central plains in the nineteenth century. It was the beginning of the culmination of these four nations’ war against each other, so brutal and devastating that the Comanches would soon begin to realize that no outside mediators like the Americans could help them resolve the conflict.

In his report, A. P. was careful to tell officials in Washington that all these conflicts were taking place far out on the plains, what he believed was “the hunting ground of the Osages, the Comanches, and their allies, as the hunting grounds of the Pawnee Mohaws and Chians are on the head of the Arkansas and Platte rivers.” What A. P. did not actually realize that it was the valuable hunting and wintering lands on the headwaters of the Arkansas River that these groups were fighting over. Additionally, he was able to finally assure federal officials that the removed

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36 ibid. For more on the background and significance of the Battle of Wolf Creek, see Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, pp. 45-62.
tribes were not the problem, explaining, for example, that “Several hundred of the Muscogees have this spring been hunting the Buffalo, in this section of the Country, and have frequently met with the wild tribes and the Osages, but I am informed the most friendly feeling has existed among them.” A. P. planned to return to Fort Gibson in the fall of 1838, “as the indians are now some distance off, and will not be here until October, when I shall again be here to meet them.”

However, things would not go as A. P. had hoped and the delegation of plains leaders would never make a trip to the U.S. capital. A. P.’s health had been poor for some time, and in the fall of 1838, he became dangerously ill. He passed away on Christmas Day 1838. His death changed things in the southwest. He and his brother P. L. were some of the most informed people about the situation in the southwest who had acted on behalf of the U.S. government. After his death, and P. L.’s subsequent retirement to St. Louis, even less correct information about the situation between the plains and removed nations would be received by federal officials back in Washington. No one there was ever fully informed of what happened regarding the Comanches and their requests for help from the United States. But since the situation did not develop into a major conflict that would upset removal, no one in Washington really seems to have cared. Most information after 1838 came from William Armstrong, who was focused on events occurring in Texas and all the rumors that the removed Indians were going to be drawn into that conflict.

For the Comanches, their friend, ally, and liaison with the U.S. government was gone. Eventually, Jesse Chisholm would partially step into the mediator role left empty by A. P., but the circumstances in the 1840s would be much different. Yet news of A. P.’s death was slow to reach the plains tribes. Tabaquena returned to Camp Mason in May 1839, hoping to meet A. P. and

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37 A. P. Chouteau to Carey A. Harris, June 28, 1838, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #922.
finalize plans for a trip to Washington. He and the dozens of other Native people who had
accompanied him were devastated to learn that A. P. was dead. The federal government had
much less contact with the Comanches, the Kiowas, and the other plains groups through federal
officials in Indian Territory or through the removed Indians after A. P.’s death.

As for the Comanches, they must have realized that the United States was not capable of
serving the intermediary role that they desired; nor did the federal government reestablish the
trade that the Comanches and Wichitas desired. Their trade needs were instead fulfilled by the
removed groups and eventually through a reinvigoration of their northern plains trade network
following the major peace agreement with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes that they settled in the
summer of 1840. This event, which historians actually know very little about, was one of the
most important moments in the history of the plains. Had the conflict between the Comanches
and their allies and the Cheyennes and their allies turned out another way, the subsequent
relationships between the plains groups and the removed groups likely would have been of a
much different character, and may have even affected the implementation of federal removal
policies.

During the actual peace ceremony, which took place only a few miles from the Bent
brothers’ fort on the Arkansas River, thousands of horses and other gifts were exchanged
between the Kiowas, Comanches, Plains Apaches, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes. At the same
time, the Cheyennes also made peace with their northeastern neighbors, the Lakota, further
increasing the extent of the trade networks that developed in the wake of the agreement, leading

38 William Armstrong to T. Hartley Crawford, December 31, 1838, LR-OIA, West. Sup., Roll #922,
reporting A.P. Chouteau’s death. Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies. Edited by Max L. Moorehead.

the central plains to become, in Elliott West’s words “the common hunting and camping terrain of a broad alliance of former enemies.” The Bents benefited significantly from the establishment of peace on the central plains. Their massive adobe fort on the Arkansas River and at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains became a major waypoint for Native hunters and traders traveling the north/south routes. The Osages also profited from the new circumstances in the West. It secured to them an economic outlet to the West that they desperately needed, and may even have relieved the pressure of their raids on the removed groups, since there were other economic activities besides raiding available to Osage men. Many of the removed nations of Indian Territory benefited from this peace agreement as well. Traders from the removed nations were welcomed in the West as suppliers of important manufactured goods. In return, traders from the removed nations received horses and mules that could be sold for great profit in the American settlements on their borders, or sold to local removed groups who usually arrived in Indian Territory desperately in need of livestock and other goods to begin reestablishing their lives and economies in the West.

Most of the relationships that developed as a result of the treaty at Camp Holmes occurred on the plains, out of sight of U.S. officials, who lacked the vision to see the effects of those relationships from their posts on the periphery. Thus the good relationships between the plains and removed tribes may as well have not existed at all. Federal agents who arrived in the

40 West, The Contested Plains, p. 77. The Pawnees seem to have been the only losers in this deal, as they bore the brunt of significant attacks from their long-time enemies, the Cheyennes, after 1840. See Grinnell, The Fighting Cheyennes, pp. 70-83. Donald J. Berthrong also credits the Comanches’ struggle with the new Texas Republic and the Council House fight in 1839 for pushing the Comanches and Kiowas toward making a peace agreement with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes in 1840. Berthrong, The Southern Cheyennes, p. 83.
West in later years displayed no knowledge that a treaty with the Comanches, Wichitas, and Kiowas had been signed in 1835. Instead, they often wrote letters back to Washington officials with various new plans for “finally” achieving peace with the “savages” on the frontier. The federal government had vastly overestimated its sphere of control, in this particular instance and in trying to implement the larger removal project, and when officials did not see what they expected, their own prejudices and lack of information caused them to forget about the events in August of 1835 and the important developments that followed. But this does not mean that the treaty of Camp Holmes was insignificant. It was an important turning point in the relationship between the Plains Indians, the Osage nation, and the Native eastern emigrants that continued for decades to affect the political power structure of the southwestern border and the U.S. government’s Indian removal policies.41

The death of A. P. and the retirement of P. L. occurred around the same time that many federal officials in the East believed that the process of removal was coming to an end. The majority of the Creeks and Choctaws had been removed, the Seminole wars in Florida were drawing to a close, and in 1839 the remaining eastern Cherokees were finally forced into Indian Territory at gunpoint. The goal of removing Native people from valuable cotton-producing lands in the South appeared to have been accomplished, and while federal agents in the West like William Armstrong continued to send reports about possible violence on the southwestern

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41 Some historians, like Stan Hoig, have adopted the perspective of federal officials from the period on the topic of the importance of Camp Holmes, writing that the treaty signed there in 1835 “accomplished little. Unrealistic commitments were made by the various tribes to forgive and forget when others did injury to them. The government also made a futile promise that it would pay for stock stolen from the prairie tribes by whites. The principal agreement concerned permitting the eastern tribes and white free access onto and across the buffalo grounds. Further consideration of this critical issue would later cause the Comanches to tear up the pact in anger.” Hoig, Jesse Chisholm: Ambassador of the Plains (Niwot, Col.: University Press of Colorado, 1991), p. 45.
frontier, federal officials in Washington became less concerned about those reports. The Indians of the South had been forced into the West and other, more pressing concerns seemed to face the country. Removal became almost exclusively a western issue since the removals that continued to Indian Territory were made by groups being forced out of places like Wisconsin, Kansas, and Nebraska to make room for more white American settlers.

However, because of the continued lack of federal knowledge about the West and the remaining power and influence of the plains groups, many of the removed Indians were able to reestablish real sovereign spaces of their own in the West. Trade and economic opportunity had been some of the main reasons that eastern Native groups had been pulled toward the West in the early nineteenth century. Even as federal power increased in the East and more Native people were forcibly removed to the West, those economic pulls remained powerful, and Native groups continued to capitalize on them. As the 1840s began, enduring and profitable trade networks developed between the removed groups and the Plains Indians. The Osages also found new economic life by cultivating close trade ties with the Comanches, their former rivals. It was the intense conflict between those two powerful nations that had initially shaped the context of the first migrations and removals into the West. Although federal officials in the West sometimes reported about these activities, the real action was taking place out on the plains, away from the sight and knowledge of most U.S. officials. Native groups in the region continued to act independently and in their own best interests. From the perspective of the removed Indians, removal did not mean the dissolution of their sovereignty. It meant that they would continue the search for sovereign spaces in a new context.
Although the federal government exercised a significant amount of power that allowed it to begin forcing Native nations into the West against their will, it did not have that same power in the West. This lack of federal power is perhaps best exemplified by the actions of Native nations in the West—both in their voluntary migrations to that region early in the nineteenth century and in the continued autonomy that their relationships with other Native groups demonstrated.

Eventually, after the Civil War, the federal government would yet again turn its focus to the Southwest, where it continued the process of forcibly removing other Native groups from the plains into Indian Territory. Federal officials were successful in their post-Civil War efforts to consolidate and begin dissolving Native nations entirely, not because they finally gained accurate information about the Native groups in the West, but because the real level of federal power in the West had finally begun to match the perceived one.