

quarter of their total. More Cherokees died after arrival in the Indian Territory because of epidemics and continuing shortages of food. During the 1830s, other Southeast tribes endured similar experiences, including the Chickasaws, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles (see entries for those tribes). This was a shameful time in American history.

The Indian Territory

Nor was the injustice enacted upon the Cherokees and other tribes of the Indian Territory over. The Indian Territory was supposed to be a permanent homeland for various tribes. Originally, the promised region stretched from the state boundaries of Arkansas, Missouri, and Iowa to the 100th meridian, about 300 miles at the widest point. Nonetheless, with increasing white settlement west of the Mississippi in the mid-1800s, the Indian Territory was reduced again and again.

In 1854, by an act of Congress, the northern part of the Indian Territory became the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, which later became states. Then, starting in 1866 after the Civil War, tribes living in those regions were resettled on lands to the south,

supposedly reserved for the Southeast tribes, now known as the Five Civilized Tribes.

During the 1880s, the Boomers arrived—white home-seekers squatting on Indian reservations. Various white interests—railroad and bank executives, plus other developers—lobbied Congress for the opening of more Indian lands to white settlement.

Assimilation and Allotment

In 1887, Congress passed the General Allotment Act (or the Dawes Severalty Act). Under this law, certain Indian reservations held by tribes were to be divided and allotted to heads of Indian families. Some politicians believed that the law would help Indians by motivating individuals to develop the land. They also believed it would bring about the assimilation of Indians into the mainstream American culture. But others were just interested in obtaining Indian lands, since it was much easier to take advantage of individuals than of whole tribes. Many of the same people advocated stamping out Indian culture and religion and sending Indian children to white-run boarding schools. This period in United States Indian policy is called the Assimilation and Allotment period.



Cherokee Eagle Dancers

By 1889, two million acres had been bought from the Indians, usually at ridiculously low prices, and thrown open to white settlement. The Oklahoma Land Run took place that year, with settlers lining up at a starting point to race for choice pieces. Those who cheated and entered the lands open for settlement were called "sooners." In 1890, Oklahoma Territory was formed from these lands.

Cherokee and Choctaw leaders refused allotment and took their case to federal courts, as John Ross had done years before. In reaction, Congress passed the Curtis Act of 1898, which dissolved their tribal governments and extended land allotment policy to them against their wishes. Piece by piece, the Indian lands

were taken. Oklahoma, all of which had once been Indian land, became a state in 1907.

During this period, in 1924, the federal government passed the Citizenship Act, conferring citizenship on Native Americans. Two states—Arizona and New Mexico—delayed giving Indians voting rights until much later.

Restoration and Reorganization