

ABSTRACT

YORK, ROBERT ALAN. "A Free and Independent Government:" Choctaw Planters, Nation-Building, and the American South (1826 – 1861). (Under the Direction of Dr. Judy Kertesz.)

The purpose of this thesis is to integrate the Choctaw planter-class into Southern history while demonstrating how the planters' nation-building projects changed over the course of three decades as the planters integrated the Choctaw Nation into the southern marketplace. Ultimately, the planters wanted to secure a "free and independent government" for the Choctaw, which allows their interactions with the South to remain conceptually distinct, even while the histories of the South and the Choctaw Nation overlapped in the spheres of republican thought, capitalism, states' rights, and the formation of the Confederate States of America. The first chapter examines the rise of the planters in Mississippi during the 1820s, the longer historical forces that brought them into being, as well as the motives and ideologies that drove them to transform the confederated Choctaw into a politically centralized nation. The second chapter explains how second-generation planters in Indian Territory integrated the Choctaw Nation into the southern marketplace during the 1840s and 1850s, making the Choctaw planters reliant on slavery, cotton, and global markets. The final chapter attests that by the 1850s, the planters had become so reliant on the southern market that they became receptive to southern political ideology, and attempted to integrate themselves into the political structures of America first as a southern state, then as a confederate state. This project intervenes in the recent history of capitalism, Choctaw history, Native history, American History, and Southern history.

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“A Free and Independent Government:” Choctaw Planters, Nation-Building, and the
American South (1826 – 1861)

by
Robert Alan York

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Ross Bassett

Dr. Craig Friend

Dr. Judy Kertesz
Chair of Advisory Committee

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Judy Kertesz, who served as my advisor and mentor during my academic career at North Carolina State University. And to my mother, Tara York, who instilled within me both a love of learning, and the determination to carry out my goals.

BIOGRAPHY

Robert York received his undergraduate degree from North Carolina State University, and his interests include southern history, Native history, economic history, political history, and intellectual history during the nineteenth-century.

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Introduction: The Southern History of the Choctaw Planters

On July 14, 1861, an envoy from the Choctaw Nation met with the Confederate Commissioner on Indian Affairs, Albert Pike. Pike traveled to Indian Territory on behalf of the Confederate government, attempting to coax the Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee Nations into an alliance with the C.S.A. The Confederacy needed native allies in Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma) to help secure Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri for the Confederate States, and to secure a route to expand west into New Mexico, Colorado, and, ultimately, California¹. When Pike met with the Choctaw delegation, he presented them with a treaty that promised the Choctaw complete freedom of trade with the Confederacy, representation in the Confederate Congress, and, eventually, statehood on equal terms with the established states of the C.S.A. The planter-class readily accepted Pike's offer, and became stalwart allies of the Confederate States of America. Pike owed the rapid success of his mission to the cooperation of the Choctaw planters. For nearly three decades before the planters met with Pike, they gradually prepared their nation for its eventual place in the Confederacy, integrating themselves into the southern marketplace and attempting to enter into political fraternity with the southern states.

¹ Donald S. Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1995) 5 – 8 [Frazier discusses Confederate Imperialism, but not necessarily the role of Indian Territory]; Walter Lee Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 353;



Figure 1. Robert McDonald Jones and Susan Colbert: Choctaw Planter, Senator, Representative to the Confederate Congress. Right, Susan Colbert, Jones's Chickasaw wife. Image from the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The first Choctaw delegate to affix his signature to Pike's treaty, Colonel Robert McDonald Jones, best represented the interests, form, and activities of the small, but powerful, Choctaw planter-class. Jones dressed in fine suits and wore readings glasses as he poured through ledgers, account books, and newspapers in his plantation manor, Rosehill, located in Doaksville, the economic hub of the Choctaw Nation. The planter received an American education as a young man, attained political power through his economic vitality, and harbored a fierce loyalty to his nation. By 1850, however, Jones relied completely on the southern marketplace. When he and Pike met in 1861, the planter had acquired 227 enslaved men, women, and children who lived and labored upon his four cotton plantations along the Red River. The Colonel also operated three steamboats that conveyed thousands of bales of

Choctaw cotton to New Orleans before returning to Jones, laden with products to dress the shelves of the general stores that he ran in the large towns of the Choctaw Nation. In his apparel and his business, Jones behaved like a southern planter. However, he also concerned himself with questions about how to secure the political independence of the Choctaw Nation. For Robert Jones and the Choctaw planters, their meeting with Albert Pike did not signify a moment when the seemingly separate trajectories of Choctaw history and Southern history colluded. Rather, the Choctaw planters had always been a part of both Choctaw and Southern history – the Choctaw Nation’s alliance with the Confederacy merely consummated the relationship.²

Historians do not fully understand why the planters decided to ally their nation with the Confederate States. To make sense of the alliance between the Choctaw elite and white planters, historians need to consider the actions of the men who sought a treaty with the Confederacy: the Choctaw planters. The Choctaw planter-class was small, likely never surpassing a couple hundred souls out of approximately 13,000 – 18,000 Choctaw, just one or two percent of the population. The vast majority of Choctaws primarily lived as subsistence farmers, owned few, if any, slaves, and whose participation in the marketplace was limited to purchasing manufactured goods at local shops owned by planters like Robert Jones.³ Although small in number, the planters possessed most of the political power in the

² Walter Lee Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 362 – 363; Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 57 – 60; 1860 Census of the Choctaw Nation, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City [microfilm]; U.S. Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860*, ed. Joseph C. G. Kennedy, xv.

³ Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 69 – 70 [Debo’s numbers come from the *Choctaw Almanac*, published in the Choctaw Nation in 1843, which placed the number of Choctaw at 12,690 people]; U.S. Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860*, ed. Joseph C. G. Kennedy, xv [Kennedy asserted that 385 Choctaw owned 2,297 slaves, and that the Choctaw outnumbered their slaves by approximately 8:1, or roughly 16,000 – 18,000:2,297. Although 385 Choctaw owned slaves, only a fraction of that number owned more than 10. Ten Choctaw, according to

nation, as well as the means of economic production: enslaved laborers and technology. These men allied the Choctaw Nation with the Confederate States as the result of a nation-building project they inaugurated in 1826. The planters' project aimed to create a centralized, republican nation to secure a "free and independent government" by making the Choctaw Nation appear more American. During the 1840s and 1850s, the planters integrated themselves into the southern marketplace, and invested themselves in southern politics. To ensure the Choctaws' political independence, the planters sought to enmesh the Choctaw Nation into the American union as a southern slave state. States' rights philosophies convinced many planters that statehood would not abrogate the Choctaws' political independence, but assure it. Proponents of states' rights, like John C. Calhoun in the 1830s, believed that the states themselves, not the United States federal government as a single entity, possessed sovereignty and independence. These ideas filtered to the Choctaw through newspapers and correspondences with southerners such as Senator Robert Ward from Arkansas, who grew up among the Choctaw and became a radical proponent of states' rights during the 1850s. These goals and ideologies produced enough commonalities between Choctaw planters and southerners to justify a Choctaw-Confederate alliance in 1861.⁴

Scholars have divided the history of the Choctaw planters between the pre-Removal and post-Removal eras, typically focusing on the events that led up to 1832, or those that transpired afterwards. However, the role of the Choctaw planter-class in the development of the post-Removal Choctaw Nation has not been adequately addressed. The paucity of scholarship about the planters' post-Removal activities is owed to racialized assumptions that

Kennedy, collectively owned more than 600 while only one man owned more than 200 (Robert Jones). Many small slaveholders likely did not grow cotton, or qualify as planters.]

⁴ The Constitution of the Choctaw nation, October 1838; Elsie M. Lewis, "Robert Ward Johnson: Militant Spokesman of the Old-South-West," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (spring, 1954), 17.

scholars made about the planters in early works. These assumptions appear most prevalently in Angie Debo's *Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, published in 1934. Debo posited that Choctaw planters, often the sons of Choctaw mothers and white fathers, fit into neither Choctaw nor white society, and thus, neither history. She also claims that "half-breeds" and "mixed-bloods" denigrated the Choctaw, and contributed to the disappearance of the Choctaw as a unique "race" of people. Debo's racialized assumptions carried on in subsequent scholarship, creating a persistent, conceptual wedge in between historians' understanding of the planters and the majority of the Choctaw people.⁵ The categorical distinction of "race" erected between planters and other Choctaws effectively segregated post-Removal Choctaw history from Southern history; for the planters created and facilitated many of the clearest social, economic, and political links between the Choctaw and the South from 1832 to 1861. Ultimately, ignoring the planter-class's nation-building projects reifies – even if inadvertently – the myth of the "Vanishing Indian," which contends that American settlement swept away Native peoples to make room for modernity.⁶

For the past three decades, historians have wrestled with the legacy of the "half-breed" in scholarship about the Choctaws' pre-Removal history. These works typically attempt to explain the planters' roles in transforming the Choctaw confederacy – a politically diffuse collection of autonomous towns, clans, and districts – into a politically cohesive Choctaw Nation. In *The Roots of Dependency*, Richard White relied on Immanuel

⁵ Angie Debo, *the Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 290: scholarship that is more recent has carried on Debo's tradition, and have portrayed the Choctaw planters as categorically segregated from non-planters in a way that makes the two groups unintelligible to one another. Some examples of scholarship that perpetuates this kind of work includes David W. Baird *Peter Pitchlynn: Chief of the Choctaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); Donna L. Akers *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation 1830 – 1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004).

⁶ Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 64 – 65.

Wallerstein's concept of world systems, which posits that capitalism enmeshed the globe in interconnected markets during the seventeenth century, to explain how the Choctaw became dependent on the U.S. marketplace during the deerskin trade, which thrived between the late 1600s and 1790. White contested that "mixed-blood" planters, "modernizers" and "destroyers of traditional ways of life," emerged as a market oriented class of cotton growers and merchants when the deerskin trade collapsed. The planters used the wealth and power they amassed growing cotton to centralize the Choctaw Nation, gaining control of the nation's economic affairs.⁷

In *Searching for the Bright Path*, James Carson drew upon ethnohistory and the history of the market revolution to posit that the Choctaw participated in the economic changes that swept America between 1800 and 1830, which created the planter-class. The planters then used their economic might to centralize the Choctaw Nation, resist land cessions to the U.S., and protect the Choctaws' political sovereignty from America. Unlike earlier scholars, Carson attempted to mend the divide between Choctaw planters and other Choctaws by portraying the former as better integrated into the marketplace than the latter, but still engrossed in the same cosmology, and possessing an ardent Choctaw nationalism. Greg O'Brien similarly writes from an ethno historical perspective, asserting in *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age* that the collapse of the deerskin trade transformed the Choctaws' ideas about power. O'Brien argued that before and during the deerskin trade, deer possessed spiritual significance, and the ability to influence spiritual forces was necessary to hunt them. During the deerskin trade, the Choctaw hunted tens of thousands of deer annually for skins,

⁷ Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 116, 118, 124 - 126

which they sold to European traders, giving Choctaw leaders access to manufactured goods, which they redistributed as gifts to create political reciprocity. As a result, deerskins became commodities, and economic power became as important as spiritual power for Choctaw leaders. When the trade collapsed, the idea of spiritual power withered as the planter-class that emerged arrested power through purely economic means by growing cotton, a plant bereft of spiritual significance, unlike deer. The planters used their new economic power to seize command of the Choctaw government, and transform the “multiethnic confederacy” into a nation state.⁸

In the earliest scholarship on the Choctaws’ post-Removal history, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, Angie Debo posited that the Choctaw people ostracized the “mixed-blood” planters because they mistrusted the racially mixed people. Debo believed that the planters were too southern to be Choctaw, and too Choctaw to be southern. In the same vein as Debo, Donna L. Akers, author of *Living in the Land of Death*, considered the planters unimportant after Removal. According to Akers, the planters had been too rich and too privileged to play any real role in “actual” Choctaw society. As such, Akers banished the planters to the periphery of her scholarship, arguing that they fit “neither in Choctaw nor white culture.” Owing to the divides erected by scholars between planters and the majority of

⁸James Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaw from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 87, 102; Greg O’Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750 – 1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 109 – 114; other works have touched upon the idea of economics and nationalism as factors that shaped the nation-building projects of the planters, such as Mary Elizabeth Young, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts, and Rednecks: Indian Allotment in Alabama and Mississippi* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961); Duane Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Choctaws, the nation-building projects of the planters in Indian Territory – and the Choctaws’ interactions with the South after Removal – have been largely unexplored.⁹

Recent scholarly interest in the history of capitalism presents an opportunity to expand upon post-Removal Choctaw history by creating a history of the planters’ economic and political activities as they related to Southern and American history. The new history of capitalism theorizes that slavery and capitalism evolved side by side in America through global cotton markets.¹⁰ Walter Johnson’s *River of Dark Dreams* and Sven Beckert’s *Empire of Cotton* stand at the fore of the new scholarship. Both works elucidate how American capitalism emerged to feed the cotton-hungry textile mills of Britain and New England, relying on cotton, slave labor, and the removal and genocide of the Native peoples who lived on, cultivated, and shaped the American landscape. The two monographs also demonstrate how the lives of white planters, white yeomen, and enslaved peoples intertwined.

Neither Beckert nor Johnson, however, explores how Native peoples like the Choctaw planters integrated themselves into the southern marketplace and the capitalist

⁹ Donna L. Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation 1830 – 1860*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004) 127; Angie Debo, *the Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 77 – 78.

¹⁰ Seth Rockman, “What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Volume 34, No. 3, (Fall 2014), 44; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10 – 11; Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has never been told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xvi, xviii; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), xix – xxi; The history of capitalism draws slavery and capitalism together, implicating the North as complicit in slavery and vital to its survival and expansion in the 19th century. The historiography argues against earlier scholars, like Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), and Douglas R. Egerton “Markets without a Market Revolution: Southern Planters and Capitalism”, *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, pp. 207 – 221. Both works argued that southern planters did not operate in a capitalist system, but reinvested all of their money in land in slaves rather than agricultural improvements or mechanical advancements of any sort, which stunted the development of capitalist markets. However, the new scholarship argues that slavery did not stymie capitalism, but bolstered it and shaped it. Works that follow this argument include Chris Evans, “The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity, 1650 – 1850,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol 69, No. 1 (July 2012), pp. 71 – 100; Barrington Moore, “The American Civil War: The Last Capitalist Revolution,” in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the making of the modern World*, pp. 111 – 115 (1966).

world system. Johnson and Beckert assert that capitalism victimized Native peoples – enslaved them, killed them, robbed them of their homes and their lands. These claims are true, but portray native peoples with minimal agency, and tend to overlook how native peoples actively exploited slave labor, cultivated cotton for the marketplace, and became dependent on the market for their livelihoods and prominence.¹¹ Capitalism and markets shaped and directed the Choctaw planters’ post-Removal nation-building projects, enmeshing the planters so deeply into the southern marketplace that when the Confederates States of America arose, the planters – with eyes wide open – allied the polity that they created with the destiny of the South.¹²

To examine how the Choctaw planters integrated themselves into the same economic systems as southerners would allow for a richer understanding of Choctaw history, American history, Southern history, and Native history. Demonstrating that the planters belonged to both Choctaw and Southern history rectifies the problem with Debo’s and Akers’s scholarship, namely the idea that the planters belonged to neither history. The planters integrated themselves into the southern market, and attempted to enter into political union with southerners; but they did so as Choctaws, for the purposes of securing the Choctaw Nation’s political independence.

¹¹ Although Native participation in slavery and market-economics has gone unrecognized by scholars who study the history of capitalism, historians like Tiya Miles have constructed histories that trace the emergence and growth of plantation culture among the Cherokee. Miles work comes from a gendered and racial perspective, and focuses on what changed among the Cherokee, rather than how market forces actively shaped the activities of the Cherokee planters. Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of An Afro-Cherokee Family In Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4 – 6; Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 18 – 20.

¹² Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 18 – 30; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 31 – 39.

This thesis relies on personal correspondences and government documents from both the Choctaw Nation and the United States, as well as Choctaw and American newspapers, particularly those published in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. The elite economic class of the Choctaw Nation left behind a plethora of English language materials to explore and interrogate, all of which demonstrate a clear change over time in which the planters became distinctively more southern in economic and political concerns. Although slavery has been central to the emerging history of capitalism, this thesis does not directly focus on the lives or experiences of enslaved peoples to a significant degree. In a more complete explication of the Choctaw Nation in the post-Removal era, an intense focus on enslaved peoples would be critical. However, this thesis is limited to the nation-building projects of the Choctaw planter-class. Drawing from the history of capitalism, this thesis positions the Choctaw planters within the southern and global marketplaces to interrogate how and why the planter-class willingly integrated itself into these larger economic spheres, and to determine what changed about the planters' economic and political ideologies as a result.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the Choctaw planter-class in Mississippi, the forces that allowed them to emerge, as well as the motives and ideology that drove them to transform the confederated Choctaw into a politically centralized nation. The collapse of the deerskin trade in the 1790s produced the Choctaw planters by precipitating economic and political crises. Without deerskins to use as commodities, Choctaw leaders that had become indebted to American creditors sold land during the early 1800s until the 1820s. However, the Choctaw feared that if they lost their land, they would lose their political autonomy, and disappear beneath the state laws of Mississippi. In response, Choctaw planters grew cotton to achieve economic solvency, and ascended to positions of political importance by promising

to halt land cessions to the U.S. These men embarked on a nation-building project to transform the Choctaws' confederated town, clans, and districts into a nation in 1826, centralizing political decision-making to secure the Choctaw a "free and independent government." Although this project ended when Mississippi and the U.S government colluded to remove the Choctaw, the planters reestablished themselves in Indian Territory. There, the planters worked in 1838 to create a government that looked and operated exactly like one of the state governments of the U.S. to legitimize the Choctaws' claim to political independence.

Chapter two explains how a second-generation planter-class in Indian Territory integrated the Choctaw Nation into the southern marketplace during the 1840s and 1850s, drawing the Choctaw into the economic fold of the South, and making the planters reliant on slavery, cotton, and global markets. Believing that economics and marketing could secure the Choctaw Nation's image as an "improved," republican place, second-generation men like Robert Jones grew cotton, operated steamboats, opened stores, and published a market oriented newspaper to promote a carefully crafted images of the Choctaw Nation to the American states. These images advertised the Choctaws' industry, commercial acuity, and republican government. The economic activities of the planters gave shape and cohesion to their class, which internally traded economic favor for political access.

The final chapter attests that by the 1850s, the Choctaw planters grew so deeply integrated into the Southern economy that they attempted to integrate themselves into the political structure of the South, first as a southern state, then as a confederate state. In the wake of the Mexican-American War, planters feared losing their independence and land to new American states and territories that surrounded the Choctaw Nation. Fear drove the

planters, who attempt to integrate their polity into the U.S. At the same time, white southern slaveholders, failing to gain a foothold in the new territories, scrambled to find places to transform into new slave states. Southern white planters took notice of the republican, pro-slavery Choctaw Nation, and attempted to help the Choctaw planters turn their nation into a slave state. Slavery and cotton bound the interests of both the Choctaw and the South, yet the Choctaw planters pursued statehood for their own reasons. They wanted their nation to become a permanent and established part of the American geopolitical landscape. After the planters' plan to gain U.S. statehood collapsed with the eruption of the U.S. Civil War, the Choctaw voided their treaties with the American government, and joined the Southern Confederacy, where their vision of an independent slave state was still possible.

Chapter 1: Emergence

The first Choctaw crawled out from the soil, born of a fathomless cavern that opened up at the base of Nanih Waiya (located in modern-day Mississippi). Inch by grueling inch, the people tunneled their way through the moist, heavy, dense clumps of smooth red clay and crumbling black loam to reach the surface. They strained their pinching, aching muscles to pull their damp, breathless bodies up over the lip of the earth's womb, where they staggered upright and took in the sight of the lush forests that greeted them before gratefully collapsing upon the grassy mound, their figures the same soft consistency of the wet clay from whence they had emerged. Radiant, golden sunlight – the holy force of Aba, the sun god – cascaded over the land and the multitude of wet, exhausted Choctaw. The sunshine baked the freshly born people, giving firmness and strength to their forms before they rose up and spread across the land that had given birth to them, multiplying and creating prosperous clans and towns. When Choctaw died, they interned their bones within the earth, returning them to their mother. Nanih Waiya, or “Iholitopa Ishki,” “Beloved Mother” stood at the center of Choctaw cosmology, and gave them an understanding of themselves as the children of the land, inextricably connected to it by birth and by death.

The Choctaws' emergence had been an arduous affair, but centuries later, in the fall of 1831, and the years 1832 and 1833, they underwent a harder, more traumatizing, and excruciatingly painful Removal. The American government, directed by President Andrew Jackson, tore the Choctaw from their “Beloved mother,” and force-marched them towards the West, prodding them along with the sharp points of American soldiers' bayonets. Once more, the Choctaw painfully crawled their way to a foreign place. They slogged through muddy

bayous, stumbled over hard terrain in the deadly cold, and clung to one another upon the decks of loud, tumultuous steamships that churned the mud-colored water of the Red River at a slow, agonizing pace. A group of affluent Choctaws – men enriched through enslaved labor and cotton plantation – shared the pain of removal with the rest of the Choctaw as the United States exiled them from their homes, their birthplaces, the bones of their ancestors, and their mother. Chief George Harkins could have stayed behind and become a citizen of Mississippi, like his uncle, the former chief, Greenwood LeFlore. However, Chief Harkins, like other planters, refused to “leave [his fellow Choctaws] to struggle alone, unaided, unfriended, and forgotten [,]” and went “in sorrow” with his people. In plain English, Harkins expressed the pain of the Choctaw to the Americans who had stolen them away from their mother. “Here are the bones [our ancestors] left as a sacred trust, and we have been compelled to venerate its trust; it is dear to us, but we cannot stay [...]” The Choctaws’ internal pain translated itself upon their bodies, as more than 2000 Choctaw died undergoing banishment. Mothers, fathers, daughters, brothers, sons, uncles, aunts, kin – their bones left cold and alone, buried along the path where they collapsed dead, hundreds of miles from the embrace of “Beloved Mother.”¹

The gloomy path the Choctaw marched stopped, however, and they emerged in a new place, wet and tired at the foot of Nanih Waiya. In the country along the Red River (modern-day Oklahoma), the Choctaw, from lawmakers and planters, to farmers, blacksmiths, and wheelwrights, built a new Nanih Waiya – one of stone, mortar, timber, and glass – in the form of a council house imposed upon the geographic center of the new Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw lifted heavy rocks, broke them, and fitted them together to create the thick

¹ George W. Harkins, “Farwell Letter to the American People, February 25, 1832.

pillars upon which the edifice rested. Carpenters sawed tall timbers into boards and beams, and pounded them into place with iron nails. Painters slathered whitewash upon the inside of the fourteen-foot structure, and lacquered the doors and window shutters with lush green pigments. Two hearths of grey stone ensured that the Choctaw chiefs, legislators, and judiciaries could keep a fire kindled during their cold, October secessions. In 1838, Choctaw planters, like George Harkens, took a firm hand in molding their fellow Choctaw, shaping them before they dried in the sun that shined bright and warm over the polity, baking the Choctaw Nation, and giving firmness and strength to its institutions and citizens.²

In 1826, the Choctaw cotton planters in Mississippi reformed the autonomous towns, clans, and districts of the Choctaw confederacy into a centralized, republican nation to secure a “free and independent government,” and resist losing the land around Nanih Waiya to the expansionist United States. Americans exploited the Choctaws’ debts to American creditors, debts created during the era of the deerskin trade that began in the late 1600s, and ended around 1790. When the deerskin trade ended, the Choctaw possessed only one thing that the United States wanted: land. Since the Choctaw did not fit into the schema of white yeomen, planters, and enslaved blacks, the U.S. attempted to shove the Choctaw from the land, and disintegrate their autonomous polities. For nearly two decades, the United States forced the Choctaw to cede huge parcels of land under treaties enacted in 1801, 1802, 1805, 1816, and 1820. By 1826, the Choctaws’ domain of approximately 23,000,000 acers had shrunk to less

² James Taylor Carson, “Greenwood LeFlore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief,” in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O’Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 200, 228; Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 30 – 31; James Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaw from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 8; Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis, 1500 – 1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 2 – 3.

than a fourth of its former size, and the United States poised itself to seize the rest.³ In the face of this crisis, a financially solvent group of Choctaw planters, men like Greenwood LeFlore, David Folsom, and Samuel Garland, seized control of the Choctaws' government in 1824. These economic elites had the resources – the labor of the enslaved and large, profitable fields of cotton – needed to avoid falling into excessive debt to American creditors. Planters used their economic might to secure places of power within the Choctaw confederacy, and promised that the land that gave birth to the Choctaw would never be bereft of its children.

The Choctaw put their faith in the new economic elite, who used their political strength to unite the Choctaw people under one government in 1826, believing that unity would allow the Choctaw to resist ceding land to America. The Choctaw remained inextricably bound to Nanih Waiya through birth and death, but emphasized that they belonged to the land with words of black ink scrawled upon the crinkled pages of a planter's diary – the first constitution of the Choctaw Nation. In 1829, the planters' strategy to protect Nanih Waiya failed when the state of Mississippi declared the Choctaw Nation void, outlawing the new government. Afterwards, the U.S. threatened the Choctaw into ceding their remaining land in 1830 in exchange for continued political independence. Seeing no other viable option, the planters mournfully capitulated. After Removal, the Choctaw continued their nation-building project in 1838, and reconfigured their government to look exactly like the government of a U.S. state. Choctaw legislators also constructed a new Choctaw identity, one rooted in political and juridical terms (citizenship) to legitimize the

³ Angie Debo, *The Rise and fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 35; Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 30 – 37, 65 – 67.

recently emerged Choctaw Nation’s “free and independent government” to a hostile American audience.⁴

The Choctaw as a politically centralized entity did not exist until 1826. Before then, autonomous clans, towns, and districts comprised a confederacy of Choctaw held together by common language, interlinked kinship networks, and a common place of origin: Nanih Waiya. The Choctaw confederacy dominated the land that eventually became the state of Mississippi, as well as large parts of Alabama, and Louisiana. By the 1800s, Choctaw towns and clans formed three autonomous districts divided between separate kinship groups, which coalesced around three different rivers. The Okla Falaia or Long People District occupied lands along the Pearl River in Mississippi; the Yanki Ahepvtvklā, or Potato Eating People District occupied lands along the Sucarnoochee River, which flowed into Alabama; and the Okla Hannali, or the Six Towns People District occupied lands along the Chickasawhay River, which flowed to the Gulf of Mexico. These three autonomous districts each possessed their own councils and their own chiefs, but shared a common Choctaw identity that held the confederacy together.⁵

Despite the confederacy’s loose political structure, the Choctaw districts cooperated when issues that pertained to all Choctaw arose. In 1811, the Choctaw hosted Shawnee leader Tecumseh, who wanted to entice the confederacy into a military alliance against the expanding United States, and to incorporate the Choctaw in a Native revitalization movement

⁴ The Choctaw declare themselves to be “A Free and Independent Government” in their constitutions between 1838 and 1850.

⁵ Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis, 1500-1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 2-3; Duane Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 32 – 33; Clara Sue Kidwell, “Introduction,” in *A Gathering of Statesmen: Records of the Choctaw Council Meetings, 1826 – 1826*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry J. Willis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 11-12.

begun by Teskwatawa, Tecumseh's brother. In the early 1800s, the Shawnee in Ohio, as well as other Native peoples across North America, including the Choctaw, experienced a rush onto their lands by American settlers who violently disrupted Native ways of life, and pushed Native peoples from their homes onto smaller and smaller parcels of land. Tecumseh reacted to the Americans' intrusion by forming a vast confederacy of Native peoples that held power from the great lakes region to the American Southeast. The Shawnee leader built upon his brother Teskwatawa's religious movement that revitalized Native peoples, weened them of their dependence on American traders and materials, and gave them a rationale to reject acculturating to American ways of life. In 1811, he took this message of revitalization to the Choctaws, speaking with each of the autonomous chiefs and headmen, attempting to win over their loyalty.⁶

The Choctaw came together in council, and Tecumseh made his offer to the three primary chiefs of the Choctaw districts – Apukshunnubbee from Yanki Ahepvtvklā, Moshulatubbee from Okla Hannali, and Pushmataha from Okla Falaia. Many of the assembled Choctaw may have been sympathetic to Tecumseh's motives. Since 1801, Americans forced indebted Choctaw leaders to cede large parcels of land to the U.S., same as the Shawnee, which must have weighed upon the minds of everyone present, and created a common problem that the Shawnee and the Choctaw needed to address. After Tecumseh exhorted the Choctaw, Chief Pushmataha forcefully reminded the assembled leaders that Tecumseh's alliance would elicit a strong military response from the United States. Pushmataha also acted with respect to the Choctaws' long-standing alliance with the United

⁶ R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 61 – 68, 72 – 79, 132 – 135.

States, which the Choctaw boasted stretched back to the American Revolution. In agreement with Pushmataha, the other Choctaw delegates rejected Tecumseh's offer and entrusted a young Choctaw merchant named David Folsom to escort Tecumseh out of the Choctaws' country. Folsom, who later became a planter, witnessed two paths in dealing with the challenges presented by the United States: one of resistance and one of accommodation. The Choctaw had chosen to accommodate rather than resist.⁷

Months later, the Choctaw leaders mobilized a unified force to fight Tecumseh's Creek allies, who waged war against the United States in the Redsticks War. Each of the chiefs who rejected Tecumseh's offer led a contingent of his district's warriors to fight the Creek alongside General Andrew Jackson. The coordinated actions of Apukshunnubbee, Moshulatubbee, and Pushmataha inspired a rising generation of young Choctaw men who saw the chiefs as symbols of Choctaw unity. The Choctaw subdued the Creek, but reaped bitter rewards for their trouble. After the War of 1812 passed, the cotton boom began, and American settlers, with whom the Choctaw had suppressed the Creek, rushed into the Choctaws' country, hungry for land.⁸

To facilitate the spread of American settlement, the U.S. government leveraged Choctaw debts to tears away large segments of the Choctaws' land, starting in 1801, and opened the land to American settlement. During the 1790s and early 1800s, the deerskin trade, which nourished the Choctaws' economy and lubricated the gears of reciprocity and political power, collapsed. As a result, numerous Choctaw fell into debt to American traders,

⁷ Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 41 – 42; Clara Sue Kidwell, "Introduction," in *A Gathering of Statesmen: Records of the Choctaw Council Meetings, 1826 – 1826*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry J. Willis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 14.

⁸ David Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 125 – 126.

and the United States fell upon the indebted men like vultures, ripping away strips of land in exchange for debt forgiveness. By 1820, the size of the Choctaws' country had diminished to a mere fraction of its former grandeur, and the U.S. grew impatient to remove the Choctaw completely from Mississippi, which became a U.S. state in 1817.⁹

The settler population of Mississippi exploded during the early 1800s in response to the cotton-boom, which developed because of Great Britain's mechanization of cloth production in the latter half of the 1700s and early 1800s. Britain's new industry created massive demand for raw cotton, which southern slaveholders sought to produce in order to secure astronomical profits. To grow cotton, the southern slaveholders needed land – good, fertile land. Unfortunately, for the slaveholders, most of Mississippi's best land, and even most of Mississippi itself, belonged to the Choctaw. A new generation of Choctaws took advantage of the cotton boom, planting cotton along the rivers in Choctaw country.¹⁰

In the 1820s, young, market savvy Choctaws became cotton planters and slaveholders, and emerged as a new economic class, a Choctaw planter-class. Ever since the collapse of the deerskin trade in the 1790s, the Choctaw scrambled to find a new commodity capable of freeing them from their economic dependence on U.S. creditors. Choctaw leaders who participated in the defunct deerskin trade had relied on the economic resources they accrued to give gifts, create reciprocity, and rise to positions of political prominence. When the deerskin trade collapsed, the influence of the Choctaw leaders who relied on it waned.

⁹ James Taylor Carson, "Greenwood LeFlore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O'Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 226.

¹⁰ David Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 125, 128, 130 – 132; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014) 107, 114 - 119; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4 – 7.

Furthermore, Choctaw leaders' credibility took several severe blows when they sold massive parcels of Choctaw land, precipitating a crisis for the Choctaw, who feared America might completely absorb the country. In the 1820s, the financially solvent Choctaw planter-class emerged to fill the political and economic vacuums, and halt the Choctaws' land cessions to the United States using cotton and enslaved labor.¹¹

The Choctaws' experience of slavery began with the deerskin trade in the late 1600s, which created the foundation from which the planters arose as a slaveholding class. Before the Choctaw knew anything of economically motivated slavery, native peoples practiced forms of captivity that often ended when captors adopted captives as fictive-kin, integrating them into society and ending their captivity. During the deerskin trade, however, some native peoples began to participate in colonial slavery, which relied on commodifying human beings. As native peoples hunted tens of thousands of whitetail deer, they began to kill off the animal in their own countries. As a result, Natives peoples ranged further out, trespassing upon the territory of other Native groups, which led to conflict, culminating in slave raids. Natives took slaves because merchants in places like Charleston purchased them, loading them upon ships that conveyed the condemned souls to damnation on the hot, brutal sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Slave raiding proved an easy way for native peoples to pay off their credit to Colonial merchants, since merchants bought the enslaved for the price of 200 deerskins, which further intensified the trade.¹² Slave raids made the Native peoples of the Southeast familiar with the economic importance of slavery in European and, later, American

¹¹ Greg O'Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750 – 1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 99, 109; Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 97 – 101;

¹² William L. Ramsey, *The Yamasee War: A Study of Culture, Economy, and Conflict in the American South* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 36 – 37.

society. When the cotton boom began in the 1800s, the Choctaw turned from selling the enslaved to exploiting their labor to produce cotton, a leap that might not have happened if not for the Choctaws' exposure to human commodification during the deerskin trade. The Choctaw transformed from a people who sold the enslaved, to one who bought and used them for capitalist accumulation.¹³

The planter-class that came into being in the 1820s frequently had Choctaw mothers and American or European fathers, both of whom gave their children tools to navigate Choctaw and American society. A Choctaw mother gave their children belonging to a Choctaw kinship group, which wove the children into systems of reciprocity and responsibility, helping them develop a sense of self as connected to kin. Power and property flowed through the maternal line, allowing bicultural Choctaws to ascend to positions of political prominence. Greenwood LeFlore, who became a chief in 1826, relied in part on the prominence of his mother's family.¹⁴ White fathers taught their children about market economics, republican government, and even plantation slavery, frequently sending their children to be educated among Americans. Since children born to Choctaw mothers and white fathers possessed access to both Choctaw kinship networks and American political and economic philosophies, they thrived as merchants and planters during the 1820s, even when other Choctaws lost hold over their livelihoods.¹⁵

¹³ Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 35 – 45, 69 – 72;

¹⁴ James Taylor Carson, "Greenwood LeFlore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O'Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 224.

¹⁵ James Taylor Carson, "Greenwood LeFlore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O'Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 225.

Educated among Americans in Tennessee, the Choctaw planter Greenwood LeFlore exploited the labor of thirty-two enslaved men and women who toiled upon the planter's 250-acre cotton plantation in Choctaw country. LeFlore transformed his economic might into political power in 1824, when the United States aggressively pushed to remove the Choctaw from the claimed boundaries of the state of Mississippi, which occupied the Choctaws' land. The majority of the Choctaw people and the small planter-class did not want to leave their homes or surrender their political autonomy, and LeFlore promised his fellow Choctaws that he could protect the land, maneuvering himself towards political office. Impressed by LeFlore's economic stature and his resistance to land cessions, many Choctaw supported the planter's bid for power. In 1824, LeFlore deposed his own uncle, Chief Robert Cole of the Okla Falaia District. As Cole's maternal nephew, LeFlore had been in line for the chieftainship, but the emergency that the Choctaw faced, the United States' insistence on Removal, required LeFlore to expedite his ascendance. As LeFlore took power, David Folsom, the same man who led Tecumseh out of the Choctaw Nation fifteen years earlier, ousted Moshulatubbee to become the Chief of the Okla Hannali District. A third young planter, Samuel Garland, gained power, although not a chieftainship, in the Yanki Ahepvtvklā District. Garland put together enough support to help LeFlore and Folsom perpetuate a nation-building plan for the Choctaw that the two chiefs had put together. Chief LeFlore, Chief Folsom, and their planter allies believed that in order to protect the Choctaws' land, political decision-making had to be centralized, and the confederated districts unified into a single political entity.¹⁶

¹⁶ James Taylor Carson, "Greenwood LeFlore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O'Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 227 - 228; Clara Sue Kidwell, introduction to *A Gathering of Statesmen: Records of the Choctaw Council Meetings, 1826 - 1826*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry J. Willis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 22 - 25; *Duane*

On August 5, 1826, representatives from the Choctaw towns, clans, and districts came together under LeFlore and Folsom to draft a new government as part of the Choctaw elites' first nation-building project. The Choctaw planters undertook their project to unify the Choctaw Nation, and give the Choctaw government greater cohesiveness to resist land cessions. To enshrine the Choctaws' new government on paper, a young man named Peter Pitchlynn, the son of a white trader named John Pitchlynn, and Samuel Garland's brother-in-law, transcribed LeFlore's spoken dictates into the Choctaw language. In doing so, Pitchlynn created the first written constitution of the new, centralized Choctaw nation, which had the authority to make decisions and laws for each of the divisions: districts, towns, and even kinship groups. The momentous events impressed themselves upon Pitchlynn, and he named his son Lycurgus. Lycurgus, a legendary Spartan lawmaker of Greek antiquity, had also reformed his government during a time of crisis, the same as LeFlore. Pitchlynn's choice to name his son Lycurgus evidences the fact that the men who framed the Choctaws' new constitution possessed a familiarity with the same literature about republics and democracies as Americans. The Choctaws' leading men used their familiarity with American thought and American politics to create a government familiar to an American audience: a representative republic. The Choctaws' republican government made the Choctaw appear more American in terms of their politics. As LeFlore and Folsom constructed a new government to centralize the Choctaw, they also attempted to define the idea of Choctaw as something connected to the new government, rather than districts or kinship groups.¹⁷

Champagne, Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 150 – 151.

¹⁷ Peter P. Pitchlynn, *A Gathering of Statesmen: Records of the Choctaw Council Meetings, 1826 – 1828*, translated by Marcia Haag and Henry J. Willis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013); Peter P. Pitchlynn to Lycurgus Pitchlynn, August 21, 1846, Peter P. Pitchlynn Collection, University of Oklahoma

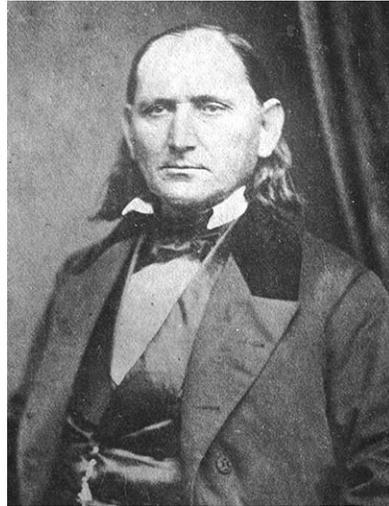


Figure 2. Peter Pitchlynn: Choctaw Chief, Senator, and Slaveholder. Image from the Oklahoma History Center.

Article II of the Choctaw Constitution gave the Choctaw central government the sole authority to dispose of or to protect the Choctaws' land, and bound the idea of what it meant to be Choctaw to the national government. Ostensibly, Article II prevented the United States from poaching Choctaw lands from indebted Choctaw leaders, because it forbade any district to sell land unless the other districts concurred. Article II went beyond its stated purpose, however, and created a new idea about what it meant to be Choctaw. "The land where we

Western History Collections Online; Plutarch, *Selected Lives and Essays*, translated by Louise Ropes Loomis (Roslyn: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1951), 1 – 31.

reside,” LeFlore stated, “belongs to all who are called Choctaw people.” LeFlore connected the idea of being Choctaw to the land, as it had been since the Choctaw emerged, and connected the land to the central government. When the central government became the guardian of the land, the national government became the guardian of a new, politically defined Choctaw people. This, LeFlore and Folsom hoped, would give the new government the legitimacy it needed to control the internal affairs of the Choctaw nation as well as the nation’s external affairs. However, since LeFlore and Folsom placed the land under the authority of the new government, the two chiefs connected the land to the Choctaw polity in a way that the U.S. and Mississippi noticed. American lawmakers realized that in order to subvert the Choctaws’ claims to the land, and open Choctaw country to American settlement, the Choctaw nation had to be extinguished.¹⁸

On February 4, 1829, the legislature of the state of Mississippi voided the political independence of the Choctaw nation, and submerged the Native polity beneath the laws of the state. According to Mississippi, the Choctaw nation did not exist. The state declared Choctaw laws void, prohibited councils, and outlawed leaders from performing the duties of their elected offices. In response, the Choctaw Nation appealed to the United States for help, but President Andrew Jackson harbored sympathy for the American settlers. Jackson asserted that the federal government could not – would not – guarantee the Choctaws’ political independence unless the Choctaw agreed to leave Mississippi for a new tract of land out West. “We have as a Nation our own laws, and are governed by them,” David Folsom protested, asserting that the Choctaw did not wish to abandon the land of their “forefathers.”

¹⁸ Peter P. Pitchlynn, *A Gathering of Statesmen: Records of the Choctaw Council Meetings, 1826 – 1828*, translated by Marcia Haag and Henry J. Willis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 50 – 51.

The Choctaw knew that Mississippi had no right to make laws for them. That responsibility, like the land itself, belonged to the Choctaw Nation. Furthermore, Folsom insisted that the Choctaws' treaties with the United States obligated the federal government to respect and protect the Choctaws' independence from all threats, including the state. Americans in congress who opposed Indian Removal agreed with Folsom. The Choctaw, American lawmakers argued, possessed a separate government from Mississippi, a government that had roots that stretched back to a time before the American republic existed¹⁹. The Choctaw also had treaties with the United States that stretched back for decades, which implied that the United States already recognized the independence of the Choctaw polity. Pro-Removal men grappled with these compelling ideas, and countered by promoting an image of Native peoples as "wandering savages" to delegitimize the standing of southeastern nations.²⁰

Men like President Andrew Jackson and Michigan's territorial governor Lewis Cass argued that the Native peoples of the South did not possess legitimate governments, and that the Native peoples in general did not have a genuine claim to their lands. Lewis Cass clearly stated the pro-Removal party's stance on Native peoples when he called the Native peoples of the South "a barbarous people depending for subsistence upon the scanty and precarious supplies furnished by the hunt," who could not "live in contact with a civilized community." Jackson concurred, and asked the American public if they would rather have a country "covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages" instead of a republic of "cities,

¹⁹ The fact that the Choctaw Nation as a single entity had only come into being in 1826 did not seem to dissuade this line of thinking.

²⁰ Chief David Folsom to Colonel William Wart, November 7, 1829, Grant Foreman Collection, Box 10, Folder 5, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Ok; *Gales and Seaton's Register*, May 18, 1830, 1042 "[Natives] derived from [U.S. treaties] no political existence. The treaty merely recognized that which had existence at the time it was made. It gave the Indians Nothing. [...] They have not formed a Government. They always had a government."

towns, and prosperous farms...” Cass’s and Jackson’s argument relied on portraying natives as people that did not use the land to its fullest potential, and had not developed any form of sophisticated political order. This philosophy required adherents to ignore the fact that the Choctaw possessed “towns and prosperous farms” that grew corn and cotton, and that the Choctaw had nourished themselves primarily by agriculture since they emerged. On top of that, the Choctaw had a written constitution, which evidenced their capacity for structured government, at least as Americans understood it. The pro-Removal party realized that to strike at the Choctaws’ legitimacy as a nation, they needed to disparage the men who framed the Choctaw constitution, and wove the Choctaws’ most potent arguments for political independence: the Choctaw planters.²¹

John Coffee, a United States agent sent to influence the Choctaw and Chickasaw to remove to Indian Territory in 1826, noted the prominence of American educated Choctaws and Chickasaws in the new national governments of those nations. Coffee reported that “a few half-breeds [...] who have been educated and are more enlightened have great influence with [the Indians],” and that the planters’ influence had “been used to keep the nation together” for the planters’ own benefit. Coffee never said what the planters stood to gain by resisting Removal, but his words reflected how some Americans portrayed the Choctaw planter-class. Lewis Cass declared that while some planters could afford to live rich lives growing cotton, most of the Native peoples of the South lived in “helpless and hopeless poverty.” Andrew Jackson accused men like LeFlore and Folsom of taking advantage of the Choctaw Nation. President Jackson knew that the planter-class stood in the way of Removal,

²¹ Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Removal, A brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005), 115 – 121, 127 – 128 [Removal of the Indians, Lewis Cass; State of the Union Address, Andrew Jackson]. John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, edited by C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 19, 26 – 27.

and claimed that the planters failed to take into account the needs of the “real” Choctaw people, who Jackson insisted only wanted to live by the hunt, not cultivate the land as the Choctaw did. Americans, Jackson argued, would destroy the Natives if Removal did not occur, which cast his motives in a benevolent light. When Americans labeled the planters as duplicitous and Native peoples as helpless “wandering savages,” they discredited the Choctaw Nation as a politically independent body by casting disparities on the Choctaws’ capacity for self-government.²²

In 1830, the Choctaw Nation’s leaders acquiesced to Removal. It devastated the Choctaw to leave their home, their mother, and the bones of their ancestors. However, President Jackson promised that if the Choctaw relocated to Indian Territory, they could continue to “live under their own rude institutions.” Jackson effectively let the state of Mississippi hold the Choctaw nation’s political existence hostage to secure the Choctaws’ compliance. On September 27, 1830, Chief Greenwood LeFlore paid the nation’s ransom. LeFlore’s political allies elected him the Principle Chief, an office invented to allow the planter to bypass Article II, and cede the Choctaws’ country unilaterally. The chief signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, and agreed to relocate the Choctaw Nation west of the Mississippi. In 1832, the first groups of Choctaw left for the Indian Territory, prodded along by American soldiers. George Harkins, LeFlore’s nephew and the new chief, did not go silently.²³

²² Thomas Hinds and John Coffee to Secretary James Barbour, November 2, 1826, in *1826 Refusal of Chickasaw and Choctaws: Refusal of the Chickasaws and Choctaws to cede their Land in Mississippi*; Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Removal, A brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005), 115 – 121; *Andrew Jackson’s Message to Congress*, December 7, 1830.

²³ Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, September 27, 1830; James Taylor Carson, “Greenwood LeFlore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief,” in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O’Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 228.

Chief George Harkins declared that the Choctaw preferred to “suffer and be free,” rather than “live under the degrading influence of laws in which [the Choctaws’] voice could not be heard.” Harkins outlined his political thinking in his “Farewell Letter to the American People.” He believed that it degraded the Choctaw to live under Mississippi’s jurisdiction, and that Mississippi’s actions in voiding the Choctaw Nation ran antithetical to republican values, like representation and compact theory. The Choctaw had never represented themselves in Mississippi’s congress, nor would they have wanted to. The Choctaw people had never given the state of Mississippi their will, and lived in their own nation, by their own laws. Harkins reminded the American people that the Choctaw had their own political compact, legitimized through the actions of Choctaw delegates and representatives. Any social compact that did not represent the will of the governed, Harkins asserted, degraded a “free” people.²⁴

Harkins and other Choctaw leaders knew the tenants of republican ideology and compact theory well. The Choctaw studied the constitutions of the surrounding states to form their own government, and would have seen that the Constitution of the State of Mississippi declared “all political power [to be] inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded on their authority, and instituted for their benefit.” Mississippi’s constitution had not been founded upon the authority of the Choctaw people. Thus, Mississippi’s laws degraded the Choctaw. Harkins chastised Mississippi for turning against republican principles, and condemned the United States for not protecting the Choctaws’ rights to a “free and independent government.” Other Choctaw agreed with Harkins. When Alex de Tocqueville found a party of Choctaw in Memphis, on their way to Indian Territory, he interrogated one

²⁴ George W. Harkins, “Farwell Letter to the American People, February 25, 1832.

Choctaw man, asking why the people of the Choctaw Nation had decided to relocate. Tocqueville had come to America from France to study American democracy, and the Choctaw man who Tocqueville interviewed gave the Frenchman a short, but succinct response. “To be free,” the Choctaw man stated. His words echoed Harkins’. Every Choctaw knew that if the Choctaw carried on in Mississippi, the Choctaw would lose their political independence, and live beneath the “degrading influence of laws in which [the Choctaw’s] voice could not be heard.”²⁵

Unfortunately for the Choctaw, Removal had not answered whether or not the Choctaw constituted a “free and independent government.” In 1835, the Supreme Court Justice John Marshall proclaimed the Native nations free from the jurisdiction of the states in *Worcester v. Georgia*. However, Marshall’s ruling failed to secure a single Native nation against Removal. Not only that, but the language and ideas that Jackson and Cass used to delegitimize Native nations did not dissipate, and the label of “wandering savages” threatened to stick with the Choctaw, even as they relocated against their will to Indian Territory. Both Harkins and David Folsom feared that a short time after Removal, American settlers would press up against the borders of the Choctaws’ new country, giving the United States a chance to strip the nation of its political independence permanently. As such, after Removal, the Choctaw planters who migrated to Indian Territory redoubled their efforts to create a nation that looked and operated like an American government, and to produce a new

²⁵ The Constitution of the State of Mississippi, July 17, 1817 [In 1838, the Choctaw wrote a constitution that mirrored Mississippi’s, and included the same message about compact-theory, using the exact wording]; Alex de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: and Two Essays on America*, 380

Choctaw people solidly rooted in the concept of nationhood rather than tethered to the delegitimizing American concept of “Indian.”²⁶

In 1832, thousands of Choctaw trickled into their new country, which dominated the lower half of Indian Territory, and stretched from the border of Arkansas in the East to the Comanche, Kiowa, and Kickapoo peoples to the West. Other Native nations, like the removed Cherokee and the Creek, occupied the region to the Choctaws’ North. To the South, the Red River constituted the Choctaws’ border with Mexico, and provided them with fertile river valleys, like the ones Americans stole from them in Mississippi, as well as a navigable waterway that flowed to New Orleans. Fortunately for the planters, the new country possessed a mild climate that proved well suited for cotton. Within a few years, riversides bloomed with white bolls, picked, ginned, and baled by enslaved men and women who came with the Choctaw during Removal. When the planter class arrived in Indian Territory, they colonized the new country, and imposed a Choctaw order upon the land, using names, ploughs, and political boundaries to create a new Choctaw Nation that revolved around the central government.²⁷

As the Choctaw sowed corn, beans, squash, sweet potatoes, and cotton into the fertile soil along the Kiamichi, Blue, and Red Rivers, they also rooted themselves to the land. The

²⁶ Chief David Folsom to Colonel William Wart, November 7, 1829, Grant Foreman Collection, Box 10, Folder 5, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Ok; George W. Harkins, “Farwell Letter to the American People, February 25, 1832.

²⁷ Robert H. Gudmestad, *Steamboats and the Rise of the Cotton Kingdom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 80 – 81. Gudmestad makes the argument that the navigability of the Red River determined where Native peoples were removed to. Americans concerned themselves with commerce and navigation, and thus moved the Choctaw beyond where steamboats could travel. Most of the Red River beyond Doaksville was closed to steamboat traffic, making Doaksville one of the only places in the Choctaw Nation capable of supporting commerce by steamboat. Gudmestad does not discuss the Choctaw’s use of steamboats to engage in commerce, but his argument paves the way for a commercial understanding of the Choctaw’s use of the Red River.

Choctaw planter-class imposed symbols of their new political order onto the landscape. The Choctaw erected a council house in the center of the nation, and called the area Nanih Waiya. In 1838, the maternal symbol of the Choctaws' birth gave the central government a claim to the Choctaws' genesis as a new people after Removal. As the ancient Choctaw emerged from Nanih Waiya, so too did the new Choctaw. The planters also used recent symbols that denoted unity. The three districts of the old Choctaw Nation reflected the names of the kinship networks that lived there, but the three districts of the new country received the names of the chiefs who allied against Tecumseh's Creek allies. The district closest to Arkansas became Apukshunnubbee, where the cotton trade grew strongest; the district farthest west became Pushmataha; and the northernmost district became Moshulatubbee. Although the three districts still divided the Choctaw Nation into three governmental units, the names of the districts united the Choctaw through common history, and emphasized national cohesion over kinship and confederacy. The Choctaw planters used the symbols and names of the past to construct a new Choctaw nation, and a new Choctaw people.²⁸

In 1838, the Choctaw planters continued to centralize the nation, and wrote a new constitution modeled directly after the states' documents, modified to accommodate the Choctaws' desire to divide executive authority. As a result, the Choctaws' government became more explicitly republican. The new constitution included articles about elected representatives and compact theory that went beyond the 1826 constitution, which hinted at and rested on both political ideas, but never explicitly outlined either of them. The Choctaw planters wanted the nation to be seen as republican by Americans, and hoped that the United

²⁸ Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, 2nd Ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 57 – 60, 74; Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 46 – 47, 53; James Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaw from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 8.

States would recognize the Choctaws' right to constitute a "free and independent government" if the Choctaw presented themselves as such. The Choctaws' representatives took the form of an elected council of forty, ten men from each district²⁹, which became a bicameral body with a House and Senate in 1842. Aside from legislators, the Choctaw also elected three chiefs, who formed the executive authority of the Choctaw nation. The Choctaw divided executive authority for two reasons. First, a majority of the Choctaw did not trust a powerful executive after their last Principle Chief, Greenwood LeFlore, used his power to cede the Choctaws' land to the United States. Second, if each district maintained the same power as each of the others, then the Choctaw still ruled largely by consensus, and allowed the districts to maintain some political autonomy.³⁰

Choctaw lawmakers never hid the fact that they borrowed several elements from the various states' constitutions to create the Choctaw Constitutions. Rather, the Choctaw boasted about their ability to operate a republican government on par with those of the states'.³¹ In an issue of a Choctaw newspaper entitled the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, the Choctaw openly declared that the nation had "a printed constitution and laws, the prominent features of which are modeled after those of our neighboring states." Although the Choctaw published this article in 1851, the message had come out of the Choctaw planters' nation-building project from the late 1830s. The Choctaw wanted the United States to know that the Choctaw nation possessed a centralized, republican government to delegitimize the idea that

²⁹ The Chickasaw Nation joined the Choctaw Nation in 1838, and became the fourth district. The people of the new Chickasaw District became Choctaw citizens, and were included in the Choctaw's lawmaking.

³⁰ The constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 1838; The Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, November 10, 1842

³¹ The preambles of each of the Choctaw nation's constitutions written between 1838 and 1860 explicitly attested the Choctaw's republican form of government, something that the constitution of 1826 did not.

the Choctaw comprised a group of “wandering savages” that did not have the capacity for self-government or a claim to political independence.³²

Recalling Andrew Jackson’s ugly disparagement of the Choctaw, the planters wanted to control the image of the Choctaw Nation, and desired to “sease [sic] to be Indians” as the planter Robert M. Jones declared. Jones did not actually want the Choctaw to physically “sease” to be Native, or to shed their Choctaw identity. Rather, the planter wanted to shed the identity of “Indian” as the United States understood the term. Jackson and Cass had called Native peoples “wretched,” “wandering savages” who lived in “hopeless and helpless poverty.” As such, the term “Indian” ran counter to American ideas about “civilization” and “republicanism.” “[Why] may we not appear among the Nations of the earth?” one Choctaw lamented in the 1850s. “Why are we not fit [. . .to] be called as other men instead of injuns?” Other native peoples saw what Jones saw. William Appes, a Pequot who wrote about the injustices wrought upon Native peoples before and after the American Revolution, believed that the term had been invented to disparage Native peoples. Appes declared that the word “Indian” had no meaning among any Native community, nor in the Bible, and possessed a purely negative meaning when used by Americans. Appes, who wrote around the time of Removal, knew that the U.S. government used the term “Indian” as part of its program to delegitimize Native nations. To become a “free and independent government,” the Choctaws planters needed to create a new idea of Choctaw, one disassociated from the negative concept of “Indian.”³³

³² “Our Nation,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, March 5, 1851.

³³ Robert M. Jones to Peter Pitchlynn, January 26, 1855, box 2, folder 61, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections, Norman, OK; William Appes, *The Experiences of William Appes, a Native of the Forest* (New York, Published by the Author, 1829), 20 – 21 [I thought it disgraceful to be called an Indian; it was considered as a slur upon an oppressed and scattered nation, and I have often been led to inquire where the

In 1838, the Choctaw planters promoted a new idea about what it meant to be Choctaw, vaunting the concept of citizenship. The planters wove the idea of citizenship into their 1838 constitution, trying to bind how the Choctaw people identified to the national government instead of to kin or districts. Citizenship constituted a form of fictive kinship perpetuated by the planters, and gave each Choctaw a common bond that emanated from the central government. To be a citizen of the Choctaw nation meant to have rights protected by the national government. Before the national government existed, the Choctaw clans provided Choctaw people with social safety nets, a sense of self, protection, and responsibilities. In 1838, the Choctaw government coopted these responsibilities to give legitimacy and power to the central government, and to create a singular Choctaw people. The idea of citizenship turned the idea of “Choctaw” into a juridical and political concept in the minds of the planters. Citizenship, rooted deeply in republican ideology, allowed the planters to push back against the American idea of the Choctaw as a homeless band of “wandering savages” by rooting the idea of Choctaw to a permanent home, the Choctaw Nation, and to the government that maintained order there.³⁴

Choctaw citizenship created an exclusive political identity bound to the idea of nationhood, but also race. In 1838, the Choctaw planters concluded that black people could not become citizens of the Choctaw Nation. Likely, the fact that many planters owned slaves influenced their decision, and citizenship, as an exclusive category of identity, needed an “other” that existed permanently “outside” the civic boundaries of the Choctaw nation in

whites received this word, which they so often threw as an opprobrious epithet at the sons of the forest. I could not find it in the bible, and therefore come to the conclusion that it was a word imported for the special purpose of degrading us]; “Thoughts for the People,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, August 5, 1851.

³⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6 – 7; Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 1838; Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, November 10, 1842; Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 14, 1850

order to create an idea of what constituted the “inside” of the Choctaw nation.³⁵ White people could not fill the role of “other” since many of the Choctaws’ leading men, like LeFlore, Folsom, Garland, and Pitchlynn had each been born to white fathers, many of whom had Choctaw citizenship. While the Choctaw restricted the ways in which whites might become Choctaw in 1826, the planters never completely excluded whites from becoming citizens. In 1838, however, the Choctaw planters wove a racial limit to Choctaw citizenship into their new constitution by excluding blacks. Section XIV of Article VII stipulated that no “person who is any part negro shall ever be allowed to hold any office under this government;” section XV gave the Choctaw government the authority to naturalize – to make a citizen or fictive-kin – any “Indian” as a citizen of the Choctaw Nation, unless those “Indians” happened to be “negro;” and section VI forbid any “free negro” from settling in the Choctaw nation. These articles set limits on Choctaw citizenship, and cemented the racial exclusivity of Choctaw as a civic identity.³⁶

But section VI differed from the other two sections that dealt with race and rights. The article implied that if a black person possessed either “Choctaw or Chickasaw blood,” then they could settle within the borders of the Choctaw Nation. Although the Choctaw planters had hedged the official limits of Choctaw citizenship, they acknowledged and accommodated the fact that black Choctaws existed. The loophole likely existed to facilitate black Choctaws who belonged to a clan or town, but who could not be given national citizenship. The planters allowed citizenship to coexist with kinship networks, but the

³⁵ Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 210 – 212.

³⁶ Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 1838 [Article VIII, Section 6, Section 14, Section 15]; Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, November 10, 1842 [Article VI, section 6, Section 12, Section 13]; Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 14, 1850 [Article VII, section 11, section 16, section 17].

planters also needed to project an aura of similarity to the United States and southerners, who would have looked down on the Choctaw – more so than southerners already looked down on the Choctaw – if the category of Choctaw citizens included fully enfranchised blacks.³⁷

In 1826, the Choctaw planters undertook a nation-building project to resist land cessions to the United States. The planters created a new national government, one that unified the Choctaw confederacy into the Choctaw nation. When the Choctaw nation emerged, its founders attempted to recreate the idea of Choctaw as something rooted in the new national government. After Removal, the Choctaw planters continued their nation-building project to secure the political independence of the Choctaw Nation. The planters used the constitution of 1838 to create a more explicitly republican government, inculcate a sense of political unity among the Choctaw, and promote a new idea of what it meant to be Choctaw, an idea of citizenship hedged by nationhood and race.

In Indian Territory, the nation-building activities of the planter-class evolved as a new generation of planters came to political and economic maturity in the new country. The new planter-class emerged as the product of the nation-building project of the 1820s and 1830s, born from the new, politically constructed Nanih Waiya in Red River Country. These Choctaw chose not to rely on political posturing and lawmaking to secure the Choctaws' political independence, but turned to another potent form of power: economics. The planter Robert M. Jones in particular believed that real power flowed from the marketplace. Men like Jones and other Choctaw planters used the Red River to interact with the city of New Orleans. This allowed the planters to tap into the tremendous economic-power of the cotton-

³⁷ Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 1838 [Article VIII, Section 6, Section 14, Section 15]; Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, November 10, 1842 [Article VI, section 6, Section 12, Section 13]; Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 14, 1850 [Article VII, section 11, section 16, section 17].

south and the world-market. This had profound ramifications on how the Choctaw planters shaped and directed their political stratagem in order to achieve their goal: “a free and independent government.”

Chapter Two: Marketing Choctaw

On June 13, 1850, the editor of the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, a Choctaw teacher named Jonathan Dwight, posed a question to the paper's audience. "How do you like our thirty dollar heading?" he asked. Thirty dollars purchased Dwight printing plates to emblazon the *Intelligencer* with the image of a Choctaw man surrounded by American symbols of progress. An anvil stood to the man's left, representing the Choctaws' mastery of the mechanical arts, and the industriousness of the Choctaw Nation. To his right, buried halfway into the soil, sat a plough, denoting that the Choctaw were an agricultural people, and that they shaped the land, controlled it, and transformed it from "wilderness" into "civilization." A printing press behind the Choctaw man informed an American audience that the Choctaw had become a highly literate people – a people who not only consumed information, but also actively produced it. Twenty years earlier, President Andrew Jackson had projected an image of the Choctaw as a "wandering race, wearing the tomahawk and scalping knife..."¹ With the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, the Choctaw planters shaped and produced their own image of the Choctaw Nation, an image that the elites marketed to both the United States and to their fellow Choctaws.²

¹ "What Kinds of Houses do the Choctaw Live in?" *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, November 13, 1850.

² "Untitled," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, June 13, 1850.

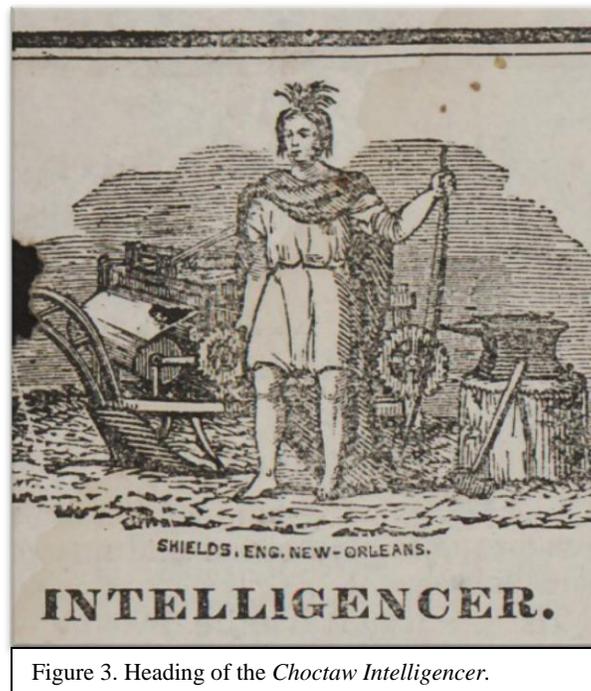


Figure 3. Heading of the *Choctaw Intelligencer*.

The plates that produced the symbol rich image heading the *Choctaw Intelligencer* originated in the minds of the Choctaw planters before an artisan pounded them into shape in New Orleans and the steamboat *Mustang* conveyed them north, porting at Doaksville with goods destined for stores in the nation's towns. The town of Doaksville shared an intimate economic relationship with New Orleans where Choctaw planters sold their cotton downriver and shuttled manufactured goods upriver, where the goods became available for purchase by the Choctaw. The *Choctaw Intelligencer* vaunted the relationship between the two centers of commerce, and ran advertisements that marketed New Orleans stores, forwarding agents, and cotton factors to interested Choctaws.

By 1850, a new planter-class had come to prominence, a second-generation that focused their energy on commerce, and wanted to integrate the Choctaw Nation into the southern-marketplace. Although understudied in the history of capitalism, the Choctaw integrated themselves into a capitalist world system via the Red River, which allowed the Choctaw to create a thriving economic intercourse with the commercial metropolis of New Orleans. Cotton grown in Doaksville found its way to New Orleans, from whence the fiber traveled to England or New England to become cloth, much of which returned to the South and the Choctaw Nation to clothe planters, subsistence farmers, and enslaved laborers alike. Steamboats returned to the Choctaw with goods from around the globe – sugar and coffee from South America and Cuba, manufactured goods from New England, and decorative furniture from Europe – that Choctaw customers purchased in Choctaw stores. Between 1810 and 1850, slave labor and cotton wove the South, North, and Europe into a single capitalist world system.³ Raw cotton flowed from the South to the manufactories of the North and England. In turn, Northern and European capitalists financed the southern planters' activities, and sold them tools and materials to ensure a steady flow of the lucrative fiber. The Choctaw planters tapped into these commercial forces, and used them to attain economic and political power. As the planters integrated themselves into capitalist markets, they found the inspiration to reform their previous nation-building project. The planters sought to use the marketplace to justify the Choctaw Nation's claims to being an "improved," republican and commercial nation, worthy of a "free and independent government."

³ Seth Rockman, "What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?" *Journal of the Early Republic*, Volume 34, No. 3, Fall 2014, 44; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10 – 11; Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has never been told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xvi, xviii; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), xix – xxi.

During the 1820s, Choctaw planters like Greenwood LeFlore, David Folsom, and Samuel Garland used the marketplace to amass wealth and political prestige. These men, and other Choctaw planters, took advantage of enslaved people, grew cotton, and participated in the very cotton-boom that made the Choctaws' land the target of American settlers. The planter-class had participated in the market, and reaped tremendous dividends in terms of economic security and political power. As such, the planters became familiar with the tools needed to run a successful plantation enterprise: land, slavery, and access to the market. Luckily for the planters, Removal did not completely rob the Choctaw of these tools. The Choctaws' new country possessed everything the planters needed to continue – and expand – their economic livelihoods. LeFlore received reports from American and Choctaw scouts about the Choctaws' new country in Indian Territory in late 1830, after he signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. The soon-to-be-deposed chief noted that his nation's new country possessed “fertile and easily cultivated land,” and would permit the Choctaw to engage in “commercial intercourse with [New] Orleans” by way of the Red River. LeFlore never set foot in Indian Territory, but he knew the formula for economic success in the southern marketplace. The Choctaw planters, and their nation-building ambitions, survived Removal in large part because the Choctaws' new land supported cotton, and provided the planters with riverine access to the South's most important commercial metropolis.⁴

During Removal, a majority of the Choctaw planters relocated to Indian Territory to rebuild the foundations of their economic and political strength. However, many planters refused to go. Greenwood LeFlore never left Mississippi. Rather, LeFlore became a citizen of

⁴ Greenwood LeFlore to John Eton, December 2, 1830, Choctaw Agency, Emigration: Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs (1826 – 1845), Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

that state, and participated in state politics among the remnants of the Choctaw who stayed behind. One of LeFlore's confederates, Samuel Garland, expressed distaste with the new country in a letter to Peter Pitchlynn. Garland, Pitchlynn's brother-in-law, declared himself contented in Mississippi, and had been unimpressed by the "wilder country" he saw when he visited. In spite of Garland's distaste for the new land, the planter did eventually immigrate to the new Choctaw Nation. Peter's American father, John Pitchlynn, also scrutinized the Choctaw's Red River lands. John wrote to Peter in 1833, asking his son about the lands along the Red River. The elder Pitchlynn heard that planters like David Folsom, who reestablished himself in Indian Territory early, bragged about the soil's fecundity. John needed to know if those planters' claims could be trusted. The elder Pitchlynn did not "wish to go [to the Red River] with so many slaves" if the land could not support cotton. Peter Pitchlynn himself left Mississippi early, established his home in the new country, and built a plantation that grew to encompass Pitchlynn's family and eighty-one enslaved men, women, and children by 1860. While the established Choctaw planter-class agonized over the prospect of leaving Mississippi, a second-generation planter-class emerged. Some of these new planters came from the wealthy Folsom, LeFlore, and Garland families while others rose through the ranks by economic strength alone. The new men built a kinship structure predicated on economic class and political reciprocity, matured politically and economically along the banks of the Red River, and grew up to be unapologetically Choctaw in political allegiance, but distinctively southern in terms of their economic concerns.⁵

⁵ James Taylor Carson, "Greenwood LeFlore: Southern Creole, Choctaw Chief," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O'Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 231 - 232; U.S. Government, United States, *Slave Schedules for the Choctaw Nation*, 1860; Samuel Garland to Peter P. Pitchlynn, November 28, 1833, Peter P. Pitchlynn Collection, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online;

Robert McDonald Jones represented the second-generation planter-class better than any other soul in the Choctaw Nation, and became the nation's premier capitalist. Socialized among slaves and planters in Kentucky, Jones possessed business acumen, and developed with the callousness required to exploit both marketplaces and human bodies.⁶ Jones lacked an influential kinship network, but rose to political prominence among the Choctaw through his economic strength alone. The Colonel's wealth grew to surpass that of any other individual in Indian Territory, and he rivaled the richest Americans. By 1860, Jones directed the labor of 227 slaves spread out upon four cotton plantations, which produced as much as \$100,000 worth of cotton per year, according to Peter Pitchlynn (roughly \$2.7 million in 2016)⁷. Jones sent his cotton to market aboard his three steamboats, which returned to the Choctaw Nation laden with sugar, coffee, cloth, and goods of all variety. When Jones's steamboats returned to the Choctaw Nation, they ported at Doaksville, where Jones operated stores that met the needs of the Choctaw throughout the nation. The planter had a hand in every step of the market process – he grew cotton, shipped cotton, turned cotton into goods, and turned goods into political power. Jones and his planter allies, the new planter-class born out of LeFlore's and Folsom's nation-building endeavors, wanted to weave the Choctaw Nation into the southern marketplace.⁸

⁶ Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 23 -25: Miles's work on the Vann family covers many of the same aspects of "socialization" and change that might have shaped Jones's perception of business and slavery from a Choctaw perspective to a more American vision.

⁷ "A Remarkable Character," *Daily Gazette and Comet*, February 3, 1860; <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi> (accessed September 10, 2016); <https://minneapolisfed.org/community/teaching-aids/cpi-calculator-information/consumer-price-index-1800> (accessed September 10, 2016)

⁸ Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 57 – 60; 1860 Census of the Choctaw Nation, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK [Microfilm]; U.S. Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860*, ed. Joseph C. G. Kennedy, xv; Notes and Documents, "Notes on Doaksville, Choctaw Nation," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* (Date Unknown): 541 –

Born on October 1, 1801, Jones never revealed much about his childhood. Peter Pitchlynn called Jones an “orphan and destitute boy.” The future elite likely had family, but might have lost his immediate kin to disease, tragedy, violence, or natural causes. In Choctaw society, clans provided young Choctaws access to networks of power, responsibility, and reciprocity. Kinship networks and clans allowed Choctaws to develop a sense of self in relation to their relatives. Even if Jones’s mother and father had died, Jones’s maternal family would have stepped in, but no evidence exists that suggests Jones’s family ever did step in after he became an “orphan.” If death radically reduced Jones’s kinship network, then his remaining family might have lacked the resources to take care of him. At that point, the Choctaw state might have stepped in to help Jones secure a spot at the Choctaw Academy, which accepted students in 1826.⁹

Jones first appeared in the historical record in 1828 as a student at the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky. Two years later, Jones received \$500 from Indian Agent William Ward to help furnish “22 Choctaw boys” at the Academy.¹⁰ This may have meant that Jones had stepped into a leadership role, and knew how to responsibly spend the money Ward gave him, although he had not yet graduated from the Academy. The Choctaw Nation established

546; Michael L. Bruce, “The Life and Times of Robert M. Jones,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* Vol. LXVI, No. 3 (Fall: 1988): 294 – 303.

⁹ Gravestone of Robert M. Jones: <http://image1.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gsr&GSfn=Robert&GSmn=M&GSln=Jones&GSbyrel=in&GSby=1808&GSdyrel=all&GSdy=&GSentry=0&GSst=0&GSgrid=&df=all&GSob=n> (accessed August 5, 2016); Clara Sue Kidwell, “Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi before 1830,” in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O’Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 211 – 212. The experience of being an “orphan” had likely not been meaningless to Jones, who spent nearly the rest of his life trying to help the Choctaw secure Orphan Claims to ensure that orphaned Choctaws received the funds they needed to be comfortably taken care of or to start lives for themselves: “General Council,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, October 30, 1850; U.S., “An act providing for the payment of commissioners of orphan claims,” *Congressional Series of United States Public Documents*, Volume 2363, 511: “Robert M. Jones...who served as [commissioner] three years investigating orphan claims.”

¹⁰ United States, *Index to Executive Documents of the United States*, January 1, 1855, 22.

the Academy to educate young Choctaw boys and men about American government, language, and business. At the Academy, Jones received the knowledge that he needed to build his later fortune, and received praise from the Academy's superintendent, Richard Mentor Johnson, who lauded Jones's force of character and capacity for business. Jones attended school with children from prominent Choctaw families like the LeFlores, the Folsoms, and the Garlands. Most of the leading men of the Choctaw Nation in the 1850s attended the Academy, including George Harkins.¹¹ In 1860, Sampson Folsom, Jones's nephew by marriage, called the men who graduated from the Academy and ascended to positions of leadership in the Choctaw Nation the "Kentucky Scholars." In Kentucky, Jones and his compatriots became unmoored from Choctaw society long enough to indulge a more wholly American way of thinking about politics and economics. Jones's pre-Removal history is muddy, but since Jones grew up as an "orphan," Jones might not have developed a strong appreciation for the Choctaw Confederacy to which he had been born. Likely, Jones and other Choctaw children at the Academy appreciated and respected the central government that LeFlore and Folsom created, which funded the young Choctaws' educations. This would have strengthened Jones's ties to the state, and weakened his ties to any kinship groups to which he belonged. The state, after all, had taken care of Jones, educating him when his kin might not have been able to. Jones and his classmates were the products of the earlier generation of Choctaw planters' nation-building project.¹²

¹¹ Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Choctaw Academy," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 6, No. 4 (December, 1928), 464; Clara Sue Kidwell, "Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi before 1830," in *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O'Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 212.

¹² Choctaw Academy Graduation Certificate of Robert M. Jones, Robert M. Jones Collection, Box 1, Folder 4, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK; Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Choctaw Academy," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 6, No. 4 (December, 1928), 454 – 480; Sampson Folsom to Peter P.

After Robert Jones graduated from the Choctaw Academy, he took several jobs with both the United States and the Choctaw Nation. Some evidence exists to suggest that Jones fought in the Second Seminole Wars, and led his own company of Choctaw volunteers called the Robert M. Jones Company. At a time when the Choctaw Nation used the memories of Apukshunnubbee, Moshulatubbee, and Pushmataha to inculcate unity among the Choctaw (as explained in the previous chapter), Jones may have wanted to follow in those leaders' footsteps, and strike a blow at the remnants of the Choctaw's old Redstick enemies who fled to Florida and became the Seminole. After Jones returned from combat (if Jones indeed saw combat), he worked for the United States as a translator in 1836. Jones impressed the Americans he met, and one newspaperman called the young Choctaw "an intelligent, unassuming, and very reasonable man."¹³ A year later, Jones took up work for the Choctaw Nation, and acted as a part of a committee to pressure the United States to pay for property that the Choctaw lost during Removal. Jones worked on the committee with George Harkins, the former chief of the Choctaw Nation and one of Jones's schoolmates from Kentucky. The education that Jones and Harkins received in Kentucky prepared them well for the sort of governmental work they undertook in the 1830s, and the nation took full advantage of these men's ability to communicate effectively with the United States.¹⁴

Pitchlynn, February 2, 1860, Peter P. Pitchlynn Collection, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online.

¹³ "Untitled," *The Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, April 12, 1836.

¹⁴ United States, Bureau of Land Management,

[http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default.aspx?accession=0138-](http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default.aspx?accession=0138-107&docClass=MW&sid=0m55syfz.h4b#patentDetailsTabIndex=1)

[107&docClass=MW&sid=0m55syfz.h4b#patentDetailsTabIndex=1](http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default.aspx?accession=0138-107&docClass=MW&sid=0m55syfz.h4b#patentDetailsTabIndex=1) [Captain Robert M. Jones Company]; "Surviving Warrior" and "Robert M. Jones Company," Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824 – 1881, Choctaw Agency 1824 -1876, 1857 – 1859, Roll No. 175, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK; Record Group 75 BIA, Choctaws – Selected Documents 1831 – 1836, Pierre Juzan, Robert M. Jones, and George W. Harkins to G. Harris, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 23, 1838.

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, Robert Jones turned to the market, cotton plantations, and stores to amass economic wealth. Jones exploited the Red River's connection with New Orleans to become one of the wealthiest men – if not the wealthiest man – in Indian Territory. Like many Choctaw planters, Jones confined his economic activities to the easternmost part of the Choctaw Nation. Farther west, the Red River became unnavigable by steamboat, which hindered the Choctaw's ability to access the marketplaces of the South. Jones's market activities came to a head in Doaksville, a hub of trade located along the Kiamichi River in the Apukshunnubbee District. The town manifested the power of the Choctaw planter-class, and became a model of what the Choctaw planters wanted to transform the Choctaw Nation into: a commercially connected nation.¹⁵

In 1844, the Reverend William Goode visited Doaksville, which he referred to as “a flourishing town [...] surrounded by large cotton plantations, owned by Choctaws and Chickasaws, mostly halfbreeds, and worked by slaves.” According to the reverend, the town had “the marks of thrift and prosperity.” That same year, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* gave the citizens of New Orleans a glimpse of Doaksville in an article entitled “A Choctaw Town.” The article described a place where business thrived, and where order had been imposed on the landscape through roadways. William Armstrong, the superintendent of the Western Territory, also took notice of Doaksville. Superintendent Armstrong dedicated two full pages to the town in his annual report to the Commissioner on Indian Affairs, in which he called the Choctaw town a place of trade, good farms, well-stocked stores, and

¹⁵ Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 54 – 55.

comfortable homes where the Choctaw “of every class” consumed sugar and coffee to an extent “at least equal to the whites.”¹⁶

Reverend Goode, William Armstrong, and the *Times-Picayune* all used language that imposed ideas about improvement and republicanism onto Doaksville. During the early Republic, Americans fixated on the idea of improvement as a personal and public responsibility tied to republicanism. When Goode, Armstrong, and the *Times* described the town with the language of improvement and commerce, they embedded it in republican-thought. The tenants of republicanism – commerce, order, and improvement – ran counter to the concepts of “wilderness” and “savagery:” the unimproved. These ideas emerged from Locke, who believed that land needed to be “improved” to be transformed into property, and for society to advance from a state of “wilderness” to one of “civilization.” Americans, for their part, claimed that American-influences had worked to transform the Choctaw Country from “wilderness” into an orderly community. However, the Choctaw planters, who wanted the nation to become republican, noticed how Americans perceived Doaksville, and used the town to market the Choctaws’ republican and commercial inclinations to the American people. The Choctaw planters’ goal in the 1840s and 1850s still aimed to secure the nation a “free and independent government.” Economics became the new tool with which the Choctaw planters demonstrated the republican nature of the Choctaw Nation.¹⁷

¹⁶ Reverend William H. Goode, *Outposts of Zion* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1864), 187; “A Choctaw Town,” *The New Orleans Times Picayune*, February 29, 1844; United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner on Indian Affairs for 1840 – 1845*, 439 – 440.

¹⁷ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789 – 1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 814 – 830, 909; David Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 243 – 244.

On February 26, 1851, Choctaw planters advertised the town of Doaksville to the United States. The article, “Our Town,” appeared in the *Choctaw Intelligencer* among a string of related articles meant to educate Americans about the “improvements” that the Choctaw had made to their nation and government. In the article, the planter-class utilized the same language of republicanism and improvement as the American sources nearly a decade earlier. The planters laid out the population of their town, which included 148 people: 43 Natives, 37 whites, and 68 enslaved black people. Next, the elite advertised the services that the town of Doaksville provided: three dry-goods stores, a hotel, a blacksmith (owned in part by Robert Jones), two churches (Presbyterian and Methodist), two sawmills, a gristmill, a printing office, a post office, and a physician among other business. The planters used the list of business to evidence the Choctaws’ commercial acuity to the American public, and to portray their town as an “improved” place. The article that followed the week afterwards placed Doaksville at the heart of the Apukshunnubbee District, which the publishers of the *Intelligencer* claimed to have a population of “about 12,000 inhabitants.” Apukshunnubbee, the *Intelligencer* boasted, had a greater population than both Moshulatubbee and Pushmataha combined. Since the cotton-trade had taken root in Apukshunnubbee, the planters tacitly claimed that slavery, cotton, and commerce had been the devices that transformed the Choctaw Nation from “wilderness” into a thriving, republican “civilization,” as evidence by Doaksville.¹⁸

¹⁸ United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner on Indian Affairs for 1853*, 173; “Out Town,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, February 26, 1851; “Our Nation,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, March 5, 1851; Samuel Garland to Peter P. Pitchlynn, November 28, 1833, Peter P. Pitchlynn Collection, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online [Some Choctaw, like Garland, had been immersed in American thought, and used terms like “wild” and “civilized” to describe the world around them. In 1833, Garland professed a fondness for “civilized” Mississippi over the “more wild” Red River country. As the Choctaw continued to adopt republican-institutions, their thoughts about improvement, wilderness, and civilization began to align with American ideas.]

Doaksville grew up along the Red River, the river that made the Choctaws' commerce with New Orleans possible. Ironically, Americans used steamboats to remove thousands of Choctaw from Mississippi, and then the Choctaw used steamboats to return to the southern marketplace. Steamboats allowed southerners to dominate the Mississippi River, cramming every viable nook and cranny of soil along each tributary with cotton and slaves. The same held true for Choctaw planters, who used steamboats to shuttle goods up and down the Red River. In 1856, Samuel Garland remarked that he saw steamboats "flying up and down the river constantly," carrying on the economic business of the nation as they traveled to and from the marketplaces of the South with ever greater frequency. By 1850, Robert M. Jones owned three of the steamboats that Garland watched navigate the Red River: *The R. M. Jones*, the *Francis Jones* (named after Jones's daughter), and the *Woodsman*. Jones's steamships sliced through the muddy waters of the Red River and sailed the inky pages of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, which announced the arrival and cargo of each steamboat that came to port. When Jones's ships arrived in New Orleans, they deposited a variety of goods. Sometimes the ships offloaded cargoes of peltry, beeswax, sarsaparilla root, or natural products that Choctaw farmers and herdsman traded to Choctaw merchants for manufactured goods. Most often, however, Jones' ships unloaded cargoes of cotton, sometimes more than 1000 bales of cotton at a time, many of which belonged to Jones himself, and went through his personal cotton factor, John Hobart Heald.¹⁹

¹⁹ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 73 – 96; *Times New Orleans Picayune*, June 12, 1852: "894 bales of cotton, 497 to J. Heald aboard the Robert M. Jones;" *Times New Orleans Picayune*, March 26, 1853: "958 bales of cotton aboard the Robert M. Jones;" Muriel H. Wright, "John Hobart Heald," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (September 1924), 318; Samuel Garland to Peter P. Pitchlynn, May 8, 1856, Peter P. Pitchlynn Collection, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections, Norman, OK.

The Choctaw planter-class exploited enslaved labor since the early 1800s to cultivate cotton, and the planters in Indian Territory continued to grow cotton for the marketplace. In 1837, the United States government noted that the Choctaw planter-class had “made and sent to market six hundred bales of cotton,” which brought “upwards of \$20,000” into the nation (worth roughly \$680,000 in 2016.)²⁰ Assuming that each bale weighed the standard four-hundred pounds, the Choctaw grew at least 240,000 pounds of cotton in 1837, apart from what the Choctaw kept for their own uses.²¹ The United States took an interest in the Choctaw Nation’s cotton plantations, especially Arkansan Senator Ambrose Sevier. Senator Sevier wrote a bill that would allow the United States to create a single government in Indian Territory under the pretense that some Native nations had become sufficiently “civilized” to operate a government overseen by a U.S. Director. To prove how “civilized” the Natives had become, Senator Sevier turned to the economic and political projects of the Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw Nations. The Creeks, Sevier asserted, although “in the rear of the Choctaws and Cherokees in regards to civilization,” grew large quantities of corn and raised large herds of cattle. The Cherokees received notice for their large herds of horses, hogs, sheep, and their “good log dwellings.” The Choctaws, however, set the standard, according to Sevier. The Senator insisted that the Choctaw possessed a “fully systematic and judicious” government, and that the nation had been “first [...] among the aboriginal tribes of America to achieve self-government.” The Senator spoke at length about the Choctaws’ merchants and cotton-related activities: the “88 looms” and “220 spinning wheels” in the nation, the cotton gins, the large farms, the “thirteen native merchants,” and the “600 negro slaves.” Cotton, more

²⁰ “Speech of Mr. Sevier of Arkansas,” *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, March 27, 1839; <https://minneapolisfed.org/community/teaching-aids/cpi-calculator-information/consumer-price-index-1800>

²¹ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 159.

than the Choctaw constitution, provided the pretense for Sevier's argument about the Choctaws' "civilization."²²

Before Removal, the United States adopted a policy to "civilize" Native peoples, to make them appear more American. Cotton played a major role in that policy in the South. American Agent to the Southern Indians, Benjamin Hawkins, promulgated America's policy of civilization among the Creek people, which included coaxing the Creek to grow cotton for the market. Americans believed that cotton could "civilize" Native peoples by forcing native men to work the soil and enticing Native women to spin and weave cloth to develop the habits of industry that Americans believed Native peoples lacked. When the Choctaw produced six-hundred more bales of cotton than they needed for their own purposes in 1836, the nation demonstrated the sort of intense agricultural activity and the industry that the United States wanted to see.²³

During the 1840s and 1850s, the Choctaw planters grew increasingly greater quantities of cotton. The United States did not take a census of the Choctaw Nation after Removal, nor did the Choctaw Nation itself, but evidence about the amount of cotton that the Choctaw planters cultivated can be gleaned from peripheral sources. In 1842, Superintendent Armstrong noted that the Choctaw shipped "between seven and eight hundred bales" of cotton from numerous plantations located along the fertile banks of the Red River and its tributaries. Another source for the same year, the *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, estimated that the Choctaw produced 1000 bales of cotton for the market. Either estimate suggests only a

²² Speech of Mr. Sevier of Arkansas," *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, March 27, 1839;

²³ Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and their World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 11 – 15, 191 – 192; Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733 – 1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 153 – 154, 156 – 158.

modest increase from 1837, when the Choctaw produced 600 bales, but both sources attest to at least some increase. A decade later, Robert M. Jones, mentioned by name in the Report of the Commissioner on Indian Affairs, reportedly produced “700 bales of cotton” alone. The number estimated by the report likely underrepresented the actual amount of cotton that Jones marketed. Evidence about the actual amount of cotton produced by Jones in 1852 can be uncovered in the pages of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, which published the contents of each steamboat that came to port in New Orleans. In 1852, Jones’s steamship the *R. M. Jones* made several deliveries to John H. Heald, Robert Jones’s personal cotton factor. On March 30, the *R. M. Jones* made port with 1088 bales of cotton, with 583 designated to Heald. On June 13, the *R. M. Jones* offloaded 894 bales in New Orleans, and delivered 497 of them to Heald. Both shipments came from “Towson” (which the *N. O. Times-Picayune* called the Doaksville landing) shuttled upon Jones’s namesake steamboat and delivered to Jones’s personal cotton factor. These factors suggest that both shipments belonged to Jones. If both shipments did come from Jones, then the planter produced at least 1080 bales of cotton (432,000 pounds) in 1852 instead of the estimated 700 bales. Since Jones had not been the only Choctaw planter to grow cotton in the 1850s, it is reasonable to assume – given the paucity of hard data on the subject – that the Choctaw planters, and not just Jones, intensified cotton production in the nation during the 1850s.²⁴

²⁴ United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner on Indian Affairs for 1840 – 1845*, 439 – 440; United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner on Indian Affairs for 1852*, 122; “Condition of the Indian Tribes,” *The Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, January 26, 1842; Peter Pitchlynn to Lycurgus Pitchlynn, April 21, 1849, Peter P. Pitchlynn Papers, Box 2, Folder 9, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections, Norman, OK [The Cotton crop is all cut down, corn too...My blacks [...] made a splendid crop last year]; “Receipts of Produce,” *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, March 30, 1852; “Receipts of Produce,” *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 13, 1852; Muriel H. Wright, “John Hobart Heald,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (September 1924), 318.

By 1860, Peter Pitchlynn attested that Jones earned “\$100,000” from cotton alone (roughly \$2.7 million in 2016). If cotton sold between ten cents and fifteen cents per pound, then Jones produced anywhere between 666,000 and one-million pounds of cotton, or 1,600 to 2,000 bales per year.²⁵ Later, an enslaved man who grew up on a plantation near one of Jones’s farms made note of how the planter operated. The ex-slave, Jefferson L. Cole, recalled that “the full blood Choctaws didn’t do much farming, but the half-breeds [...] had good-sized farms” and that “a half-breed man named Robert Jones near us [...] had more slaves than my master, and this Jones farmed on a large scale.” Enslaved people like Cole also offer strong evidence that the planters intensified cotton-production. In 1837, there were an estimated 600 enslaved men, women, and children in the Choctaw Nation. By 1860, the planters help almost 2,400 people in bondage, a 400% increase over a period of twenty-years.²⁶

The Red River made cotton and slavery profitable, and facilitated merchant activity that drew the majority of Choctaw into the capitalist economy of the South, even if they did not directly engage in plantation affairs. Steamboats allowed cotton that flowed down the Red River to return as a wide variety of goods available to Choctaw customers at general-stores located across the Choctaw Nation.²⁷ In Doaksville, Robert M. Jones operated a store with his French Canadian business partner, Joseph Berthelet, under the name Berthelet and Jones. Jones provided his fellow Choctaw with local access to manufactured goods that the

²⁵ \$100,000/price per pound of cotton = number of pounds of cotton/400 = number of bales of cotton.

²⁶ “A Remarkable Character,” *Daily Gazette and Comet*, February 3, 1860; *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography: Oklahoma Narratives*, Volume 12, Ed. George P. Rawick (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977, 124 – 125; U. S. Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860*, ed. Joseph C. G. Kennedy, xv.

²⁷ Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 73 – 96: “Steamboats made it possible to turn a bale of cotton floated down the river into a piano on the way up.”

Choctaw had grown to rely on. Jones left behind mounds of evidence to follow his activities as a merchant in the form of both newspaper advertisements and a partially preserved account-ledger for Jones's dealings with Peter Pitchlynn.²⁸

Every week from 1850 to 1852, Robert Jones advertised his store in the pages of the *Choctaw Intelligencer*. The advertisements state that Jones sold sugar, coffee, tea, tobacco, fresh flour, and a staggering diversity of cloth that included “Negro woolen caps, socks, and shirts, heavy and light cottonades and denim for plantations.” The last items evidence the fact that Jones served planters as well as the thousands of subsistence farmers, herdsmen, and artisans of the nation. Jones's store provided a link between New Orleans and Doaksville for the planters – either established planters or startups – to acquire the materials needed to cultivate cotton, work the land, and clothe the bodies of the enslaved. The planter Peter Pitchlynn did frequent business with Jones. Over the course of two years, 1850 – 1852, Pitchlynn purchased over \$1,000 worth of goods from Berthelet and Jones. The goods that Pitchlynn purchased ranged from utilitarian tools, like axes and fishing hooks, to luxury items, like sugar, ribbons, black pepper, coffee, and a teacup set, including saucers. Pitchlynn purchased these goods on credit, as did a majority of Jones's other customers. Accounts at Jones and Berthelet could be settled with corn, cash, or cotton, but Jones also took peltry or useful natural products, like beeswax or sarsaparilla roots. In Pitchlynn's case, however, Jones preferred payment in the form of political reciprocity.²⁹

²⁸ Clara Sue Kidwell, *The Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma: From Tribe to Nation, 1855 – 1970* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 8.

²⁹ James D. Morison, “Notes from the Northern Standard: 1842 – 1849,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 19, no. 3, September 1941, 276 – 277; A good example of how Robert M. Jones advertised can be found in an Issue of the *Choctaw Intelligencer* published on February 19, 1851. The advertisement for Berthelet and Jones begins with the arrival of the steamboats *Texas* and *Woodsmen* before listing the variety of goods now available for purchase; Ledger of Berthelet, Jones, and Company, Robert M. Jones Collection, Box 1, Folder 3, Business and Financial Papers (1850 – 1888), Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK; “Notice”, *Choctaw*

Jones himself assumed eight-hundred dollars of Pitchlynn's debt to the company. Jones could afford to lighten Pitchlynn's financial burden, especially since Pitchlynn possessed significant political pull in the nation. Jones and Pitchlynn often sent letters to one another asking for favors. Pitchlynn wanted Jones to assist him economically, and Jones wanted Pitchlynn's help in personal or political matters. In 1860, Pitchlynn wrote to Jones, and requested that the planter-merchant furnish the Pitchlynn family with coffee, sugar, and pork while Pitchlynn lobbied for the Choctaw Nation in Washington D.C. That Pitchlynn's family produced no – or at least insufficient – pork of their own may evidence the fact that by 1860, Pitchlynn had turned entirely to cotton, and relied on the market – on Jones – to provide his family and enslaved laborers with food. Jones, for his part, often requested favors in regards to scholastic spending in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, or with help in attaining land patents that Jones believed he had a claim to. In one instance, Jones even asked Pitchlynn to approach a United States Senator, Robert Ward Johnson, in order to influence Johnson to change part of a bill that dealt with the Choctaw becoming a state in the American Union (discussed further in chapter three). How Jones and Pitchlynn exchanged economic and political favors demonstrated how the new planters created new, interpersonal networks predicated on class, allowing planters to dominate the Choctaw Nation's politics through the judicious use of finances.³⁰

Intelligencer, February 19, 1951: "All person indebted to [...] Berthelet and Jones [...] are solicited to make arrangements to pay up by the 1st of January next, either in Cash, Corn, [or] Cotton;"; "Produce Receipts," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 13, 1852: *The Times-Picayune* attest the arrival of the steamer *Robert M. Jones*, which conveyed a cargo from Fort Towson (Doaksville) that included 894 bales of cotton, skins, peltries, and beeswax

³⁰ Peter P. Pitchlynn to Robert M. Jones, October 7, 1860, Robert M. Jones Collection, Box 1, Folder 3, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK; Instances of Jones's political favors can be found in his letters to Peter P. Pitchlynn: Robert M. Jones to Peter P. Pitchlynn, July 13, 1848, Box 2, Folder 5, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections, Norman, OK; Robert M. Jones to Peter P. Pitchlynn, January 26, 1855, Box 2, Folder 61, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections, Norman, OK; Robert M. Jones to Peter P. Pitchlynn, November 6, 1854, Box 2, Folder 50, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections,

Through trade, a robust plantation economy, and steamboat technology, the Choctaw planters had integrated themselves into the southern economy and the global economy. Many of the Choctaw planters and lawmakers embraced their new reality with gusto, and profited heavily from the world's hunger for, and economic reliance on, raw cotton. A vast majority of Choctaw, however, did not take full advantage of the marketplace. Few needed to. Certainly many Choctaw used annuity payments, surplus corn, animal skins, and natural-produce to buy goods from Choctaw merchants. However, although the Choctaw people used the marketplace, most did not *live* by the marketplace like Jones and Pitchlynn. Part of the planters' nation-building project for the Choctaw Nation envisioned the polity as incorporated into the South as a regular participant of the southern marketplace. This plan demanded that as many of the Choctaw people participate in the marketplace as possible, and as often as possible, to enrich the Choctaw Nation, and the planter-class who facilitated the connections between Doaksville and New Orleans. To this end, the planters attempted to coax more of the nation's citizens into taking advantage of Doaksville's relationship with the southern and global markets. To perpetuate their plan, the planters created the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, a paper designed to be part propaganda and part market guide to inspire and assist the Choctaw in taking advantage of the marketplace, especially as it pertained to the growth and marketing of cotton.³¹

Robert Jones believed that a good newspaper provided "light" to the Choctaw Nation. Part of the planter's desire for a newspaper came from his wish to see the Choctaw people

Norman, OK: "You must get Honorable Johnson [senator] to change that part of the [Territory] bill which says we [the Choctaw] may unite with Cherokees and Creeks and become a state. This don't suit our people, and we want the right to become a state single and alone if we wish to do so..."

³¹ James Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaw from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). 70 – 71, 84 – 85; Dona L. Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830 – 1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 127.

fully integrated into the debates and activities beyond the Choctaws' borders, and to immerse the Choctaw in the market economy of the Southern U.S. The *Choctaw Intelligencer*, published and promoted by men friendly to the planters' economically oriented nation-building project, served two purposes. First, the publication served a practical function, and ran articles and stories that kept the Choctaw abreast of what transpired both within and beyond the borders of the Choctaw Nation. The paper also published useful information about agriculture borrowed from various agricultural magazines like *DeBow's Review* and the *Southern Cultivator*. The paper's official prospectus posited that the *Intelligencer* would serve to be an "advocate of genuine morality, sound education, and temperance," and provided "a source of information in regard to agriculture and the markets." The *Intelligencer* also served a didactic function in that much of the practical agricultural and market information that the paper provided pertained to how, where, and with whom to cultivate, market, and sell cotton. The *Intelligencer* provided readers with regular information about the price of cotton, the level of water in the Red River to deduce the river's navigability at any given time, and information about how well crops in the nation and neighboring states fared during periods of drought or frost. The paper even published a directory of the best stores, commission agents, and cotton factors in the city of New Orleans for the convenience of the nation's planters and planters-to-be. Robert Jones used the paper on one occasion to advertise his success as a planter, and gloat about how the Choctaw Nation could produce just as much cotton – if not more – than neighboring Arkansas and Texas, which served to embolden the

Choctaws' sense of economic affluence while simultaneously claiming economic equality and unity with the southern states.³²

In the final issue of the *Intelligencer*, published January 7, 1852, Chief George Harkins of the Apukshunnubbee District (the same George Harkins who penned the famous "Farewell Letter to the American People"), called upon the people of the Choctaw Nation to grow cotton instead of corn. Harkins argued that corn seldom had a good market, but that buyers could always be found for cotton, and that "cotton is a thing that will always command money." Harkins' appeal summed up the didactic function of the *Choctaw Intelligencer*: to draw as many Choctaw as possible into the system of commercial exchange existing between Doaksville and New Orleans to increase the overall wealth, prosperity, and image of the Choctaw Nation. Ultimately, men like Harkins and Jones wanted to make the Choctaw Nation economically similar to the southern states, which had grown wealthy and influential through enslaved labor and cotton.³³

The Choctaw planters worked to integrate the Choctaw Nation into the southern and global marketplaces to prove that the nation had become an "improved," republican, and commercial place. The planters believed that advertising their commercial achievements would allow the Choctaw to claim economic equality with Americans, which the planters hoped would transform into political equality. With political equality, the planters might have been able to make Americans take the Choctaw more seriously when Choctaw legislators

³² Untitled, *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, July 18, 1850; "Cotton Culture," reprinted from the *Southern Planter*, *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, March 26, 1851; "Management of Negroes upon Southern Estates," reprinted from *De Bow's Review*, *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 18, 1851; "New Orleans Directory," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, February 5, 1857; "Crops in the Nation" and "Markets," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, December 4, 1850; "Cotton Picking," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 11, 1851

³³ To the People of the Puckshunubbe [Apukshunnubbee] District," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, June 7, 1852

asserted the nation's autonomy as a "free and independent government." By integrating the Choctaw Nation into the southern marketplace, the Choctaw planters demonstrated that the Choctaw did not constitute a band of "wandering savages." The affluence of the town of Doaksville proved the Choctaws' permanence and capacity to impose order upon the land. Robert Jones's steamboats helped the Choctaw planters become a regular economic force in New Orleans. The thousands of bales of cotton that the planters sold in the city each year gave the United States evidence of the Choctaws' agriculture and industry. In addition, the stores that Jones and other Choctaw operated gave the Choctaw access to goods from around the world, and integrated the Choctaw, at least partially, into the market economy of the United States, and especially the Southern U.S. By 1850, the Choctaw planter-class looked a lot like the southern planter-class, and the Choctaw Nation started to look a lot like a southern state. As the Choctaw planter-class intensified their commercial relationships with the South, and successfully integrated themselves into the southern and global market places through capitalist enterprises, the planters explored the idea of politically integrating their nation into the South as a regularly constituted political component of an economic system to which the Choctaw planters already belonged.

Chapter Three: Securing Choctaw Independence in the South

On January 17, 1863, Robert McDonald Jones swept into the halls of the Richmond Capitol building in Virginia, and claimed a place among the leaders and lawmakers of the Confederate States of America. The Choctaw elected Jones the first – as well as the last – representative of the Choctaw Nation to a North American government (barring the Choctaw Nation itself.) Although Jones usually emoted cynicism and pessimism in his private correspondences, the planter may have exhibited one of his rare moments of pride when the Confederates announced him the “Honorable Robert M. Jones,” “Delegate-elect from the Choctaw Nation.” As Jones took his seat among the planters and pro-slavery legislators, he might have felt vindicated. Jones, through plantations, stores, and steamboats had played a large role in integrating the Choctaw Nation into the southern marketplace. Jones represented the Choctaw Nation as a political entity in the Confederate Congress, but he also symbolized the planters’ attempts to secure the Choctaw Nation’s political independence – the nation’s capacity to legislate for itself, to control its own lands, and to elect its own leaders. In 1861, the Confederate States, which shared common interests with the Choctaw planters, admitted the Native nation’s “capacity for self-government, proven by the establishment and successful maintenance [...] of a regularly organized republican government.” In the treaty that cemented the Choctaw Nation’s new ties with the Confederacy, the Confederates offered the Choctaw a delegate to represent the Choctaw Nation’s interests in Congress, but they also took a step further, and promised that the Choctaw Nation could be integrated – if the Choctaw wanted – into the Confederacy as a Confederate state. The Confederacy’s promise

only acknowledged what the Choctaw planters already desired. During the 1850s, the planter-class attempted to transform the Choctaw Nation into a Choctaw state.¹

During the 1850s, the Choctaw planter-class planned to integrate the Choctaw Nation into the political fabric of the American South by turning the Choctaw Nation into a Choctaw state. This plan grew out of the success of the Choctaw planters' earlier nation-building projects. For decades, the Choctaw planters had cultivated political and economic commonality with the American South. First, the planters created a centralized, republican government modeled after the governments of the southern states. Second, the Choctaw cultivated intimate economic ties to the American South during the era of the early Republic, and wove the Choctaw Nation into the southern marketplace. In doing so, the planters enmeshed the Choctaw Nation into the same slave reliant system of global capitalism as the South. By the 1850s, the Choctaw planters had become as invested in the security of the institution of enslaved labor as the southern elites, and developed thoroughly anti-abolitionist sentiments. These factors created the foundation upon which the Choctaw planters and the Southern planters could come together on the project of Choctaw statehood.

The political and economic similarities that the Choctaw planters had created with the southern states led the Choctaw planters to believe that the nation had a stake in the political future of the American South. But the Choctaw elites never advocated for Choctaw statehood until the year 1850, when the U.S. debated how to integrate the territories attained during the Mexican-American War into the Union. The aftermath of the Mexican-American War threatened both the tenuous political independence of the Choctaw Nation, and the security

¹ Confederate States, *Journal of the Confederate Congress*, Volume 6, page 27; United States, *The War of Rebellion*, Series 4, Volume 1, page 445 – 466.

of slavery in the American South. Because of America's conquest of a large part of Mexico, new states and territories surrounded the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw planter-class feared that one of the new states – or one of the old ones – would push to settle the Choctaw Nation's land, extinguish the Choctaw Nation's political independence, and opening the Indian Territory to American settlement. Mississippi had done the same thing in 1829, and many of the Choctaws leaders in the 1850s remembered Indian Removal. However, unlike in 1829, if the Choctaw Nation failed to hold their land, the Choctaw had no place to go to maintain their political independence. In response to this perceived threat, the Choctaw planters worked to reorient the Choctaw Nation's relationship with the United States from one of "ward and guardian" to one of political fraternity, and agitated for Choctaw statehood as a way to ensure the permanence of the Choctaw Nation.

The South, for its part, felt hemmed in when the new territories acquired from Mexico did not go for slavery. California entered the Union as a free state in 1850, and places like New Mexico did not possess a favorable climate to grow cash crops. As a result, southern political figures sought to spread the borders of American slavery to encompass places like Cuba, Northern Mexico, and Nicaragua, to acquire greater political power in Congress.² Some southern lawmakers, however, looked to establish the already pro-slavery Choctaw Nation as a new slave state. As a sense of emergency and immediacy pushed the Choctaw towards the idea of statehood, the southern planter-class, which needed political allies, thrust out a hand to pull the Choctaw Nation into the political ranks of the South.

² William H. Freehling, *the Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776 – 1854*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 486 – 490; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 303 – 329, 366 – 394.

The results of the Mexican-American War produced tremendous anxiety for the Choctaw planter-class, who believed that the new American states and territories that surrounded the Choctaw Nation threatened the nation's political existence. In 1850, the Choctaw's border with Mexico, the Texas Republic, and the Comanche gave way to new borders with the state of Texas and the New Mexico Territory, although the Comanche still remained. The closeness of American states and territories gave the Choctaw a sense of peril, a feeling that the United States, at any time, might extinguish the political independence of the nation. The planter Robert Jones believed that "another rush from the states" would sweep away the nation like "chaff before a gale."³ The planters followed the development of the new territories and states in the pages of the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, and monitored their populations, borders, and disputes. In an article published in the *Intelligencer* on September 4, 1850, an anonymous author reminded the Choctaw that the nation had been shut in on all sides by "states of Nahooloos [the Choctaw word for white]" that possessed a "spreading and grasping policy." These states, according to the author, threatened the Choctaws' political independence because they might "swallow up" the nation. Another article published a week later on September 11 echoed the previous article's concerns. "We can never look to the acquisition of any other Territory than the one we now occupy," the anonymous author asserted. "It remains to us then to cherish an ardent love for the beautiful and salubrious country we now inherit [...] to put a little steam to our ploughs and oil to our elbows."⁴

The Choctaw planters understood that the Choctaw Nation, at least in part, depended on the United States to safeguard its borders from settlers, and that the nation did not exist

³ Robert M. Jones to Peter P. Pitchlynn, November 29, 1857, Peter P. Pitchlynn Papers, The University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online.

⁴ Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 293 – 295; "Untitled," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 4, 1850; "Untitled," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 11, 1850.

beyond the limits of America's colonial reach. Indian Territory belonged to the United States, and had been created by the United States. The Choctaw planters, who vaunted the nation as a "free and independent government," needed some way to transform the American territory into an exclusively Choctaw political space. The idea to declare the Choctaw a completely separate nation – a totally free and sovereign entity – did not occur to the Choctaw in 1850. The Choctaw planters knew how the United States dealt with autonomous nations of "Indians" that lived within the claimed political borders of the U.S., but refused to obey America's dictates. The Choctaw had played a part in the Redsticks War against the Creek, had seen the United States topple Tecumseh's confederacy, fought against the Seminole who took refuge in the vast marshes of Florida, and looked west as the U.S. clashed with the Comanche, Kiowa, and Apaches peoples to secure what the United States believed to be its rightful territory. Statehood provided a way for the Choctaw to transform U.S. territory into a Choctaw place without provoking the United States government into a violent conflict.⁵

The Choctaw planter-class believed that by becoming a state, the Choctaw could secure the "free and independent government" of the Choctaw Nation. The political atmosphere of the 1850s, especially the profusion of states' rights arguments that gathered strength in the South, encouraged the planters along this line of thought. Since the 1830s, southern political ideologues like John C. Calhoun pressed the idea that "power is divided between the states and the General Government," which allowed states – in theory – to retain

⁵ Angie Debo, *the Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 41 – 42; Clara Sue Kidwell, introduction to *A Gathering of Statesmen: Records of the Choctaw Council Meetings, 1826 – 1826*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry J. Willis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 14; Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 305 – 307; L. Boyd Finch, *Confederate Pathway to the Pacific: Major Sherod Hunter and Arizona Territory, C.S.A* (Tucson: The Arizona Historical Society, 1996), 42 – 44.

their fundamental independence from one another and from the U.S. federal government.⁶ Calhoun thought of the states as independent of the Union, having created the Union through a compact of the various states. As such, states supposedly retained their independence, so Calhoun believed, while the federal government was limited to performing only its enumerated duties in the U.S. Constitution. When the southern planter-class grew wary over the future of slavery in the 1850s, they turned to Calhoun's ideology, and declared that the states, as the constituent entities of the American government, had the express power to dissolve the Union if the federal government overstepped its boundaries and became a threat to slavery. In the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, one anonymous writer suggested in 1850 that if the Union dissolved, then the Choctaw Nation would be free from its treaties and contracts with the United States. The writer's thoughts suggest that the Choctaw planters did not see the United States as an insoluble Union, and that they believed the states could overturn the original compact that created the federal government, which would also free the Choctaw from their bonds to the Union, giving the nation the freedom to pursue a new course.⁷

Although states' rights philosophy might have played a role in the Choctaw's willingness to pursue statehood, the Choctaws' own history as a confederacy might have also guided the planters' thoughts. Until 1826, the Choctaw comprised a confederacy of autonomous towns and districts, each of which exercised some level of autonomy, yet

⁶ John C. Calhoun, "South Carolina Exposition," in *Documents of American Constitutional and Legal History: From the Founding to 1896*, ed. Melvin I. Urofsky and Paul Finkelman Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 262 – 265.

⁷ Quigley, Paul, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848 – 1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44 – 46; William H. Freehling, *the Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776 – 1854*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 506 – 507; "Untitled," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 4, 1850.

remained part of a larger system that united them as Choctaws.⁸ Even though the Choctaw had been a nation state for twenty-four years by 1850, the Choctaw retained some divisional elements in the structure of their government. The districts elected their own chiefs instead of a single executive and maintained their own legal jurisdictions, although some Choctaw pushed for a single executive. Furthermore, each U.S. state constitution that the Choctaw likely looked to for a model proclaimed the states to be “free and independent states,”⁹ which the Choctaw changed to read a “free and independent government” in their own constitutions starting in 1838. If the Choctaw planters believed that the U.S. comprised a compact of independent polities instead of a single polity, then they might not have believed that becoming a state would abrogate the Choctaw Nation’s political independence. Rather, the planters might have believed that statehood could secure the Choctaw Nation’s political independence by making the Choctaw into a permanent American state instead of a part of an American territory.¹⁰

At the same time that members of the Choctaw planter-class agonized over the territories acquired through the Mexican-American War and calculated the benefits of American statehood, southern planters realized that the war had not profited the South. Although the South got Texas from the Mexican-American War, California came into the Union as a free state, and upset the balance of power in the American Senate. On top of that, the new territories inspired a debate in the U.S. Congress about the need to cauterize the

⁸ Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis, 1500 – 1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 2 – 3; Duane Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 32 – 33; Clara Sue Kidwell, introduction to *A Gathering of Statesmen: Records of the Choctaw Council Meetings, 1826 – 1826*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry J. Willis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 11 – 12.

⁹ Constitution of the State of Arkansas, June 15, 1836; Constitution of the State of Mississippi, July 7, 1817.

¹⁰ The Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, October 14, 1850; “To the Citizens of the Choctaw Nation,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, August 21, 1850.

spread of slavery in places beyond the states where it already existed. Northern congressmen like David Wilmot spoke about staunching the spread of slavery into the new territories, and creating a reserved space for white settlers who did not want to compete with slave labor. This caused the southern planter-class to fear for the political influence of the South, and the future of slavery. The South already felt vulnerable because states like Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland had become less reliant on slavery, which weakened pro-slavery southerners' power in the U.S. Congress. The South faced the prospect of becoming stagnant, and watching the borders of slavery shrink south as the border states gradually phased out slavery. The southern planters felt their political power wane, and southern politicians and slaveholders felt threatened.¹¹

In response to the South's inability to expand slavery into the territories gained from Mexico, the southern planters looked for new places into which they could spread slavery, and increase the political power of the South by establishing new slave states. Private armies of pro-slavery adventurers known as filibusters took it upon themselves to invade Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua in a bid to establish new pro-slavery republics that America might annex. Other southerners pushed to open the Kansas Territory to slavery, which inaugurated a bloody conflict over the political future of that place, and led to the Removal of the native peoples of Kansas. Some southern legislators, however, looked closer to home, and began to take an interest in pro-slavery Native nations such as the Choctaw. Senator Robert Ward Johnson from Arkansas noticed that the Choctaw Nation, unlike Nicaragua or Mexico or Kansas, already looked politically and economically like the southern states. Johnson knew

¹¹ William H. Freehling, *the Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776 – 1854*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17, 481, 494 – 495, 506 – 507.

that the Choctaw Nation possessed a republican government run by an elite group of pro-slavery planters, which the Choctaw planters advertised in the *Choctaw Intelligencer*. In the 1850s, men like Johnson, southern legislators, saw the Choctaw Nation as a potential political ally that could lend strength to the South in the U.S. Senate, and help protect the institution of slavery.¹²

Southern planters believed the Choctaw Nation could be trusted on the issue of slavery, since the nation's leading men had integrated the nation into the same capitalist system of slavery and cotton as southerners had. Choctaw planters and southern planters shared many of the same economic and political concerns, creating common interests among the Choctaw planters and the southern planters, especially over the institution of slavery. This common concern over slavery manifested itself in material ways. In the 1850s, the Choctaw Nation cooperated with its southern neighbors to recapture enslaved people who escaped from bondage. The *Western Star*, published in Paris, Texas, issued two runaway slave advertisements on March 8 and July 26 of 1851, and the publishers of both advertisements specifically requested that the *Choctaw Intelligencer* reprint the advertisements and run them for a series of weeks. The Choctaw planters cooperated with southern newspapers, and in return, southern newspapers cooperated with the Choctaw planters. On September 11, 1852, the Texas *Northern Standard* issued a runaway advertisement on the behalf of a planter in the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw planters had

¹² Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 303 – 329, 366 – 394; Melvin I. Urofsky and Paul Finkelman, *A March of Liberty: A Constitutional History of the United States: From the Founding to 1900*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 431 – 432; Senator Robert Johnson, “A Bill to Establish and Organize the Territories of Cha-tah-kee, Mus-cogee, and Chah-ta,” (S. 221), February 20, 1854.

not only integrated the nation into a new economic system predicated on the labor of the enslaved, but also actively participated in maintaining the system.¹³

In the 1850s, as the Choctaw planters cooperated with southerners to recapture runaways, the planters also conflicted with abolitionists. The *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper, took special interest in Chief George Harkins, who sought to expel missionaries from the nation who wanted to educate enslaved people alongside Choctaw students. The newspaper lambasted Harkins, “the aboriginal colonel,” and declared the Choctaw statesman ready to revive “scalping, burning at the stake, and other agreeable Indian diversions” to disparage Harkins for his pro-slavery stance. The *Liberator* must have aggravated Harkins when it snidely suggested that the Choctaw Chief should “put a ring in his nose and [put] red-ochre [on] his cheeks without delay.”¹⁴ In essence, the paper had called Harkins a “savage.” Harkins had been a part of the planters’ early efforts to construct a republican Choctaw Nation, and had lectured both Mississippi and the U.S. about republicanism in his “Farewell Letter.” “Savage” was likely the last thing that Harkins wished to be called. As such, the Colonel did not take the abolitionists’ tirade lightly. “There is no State in the South that would be willing” to allow abolitionists to teach slaves, Harkins asserted. “It is because we are Indians that [abolitionists] suppose they can have this privilege among us.” Harkins’ statement demanded that the Americans treat the Choctaw with the same respect as the southern states while actively portraying the Choctaw Nation as in league with the South. Although comprised of “Indians,” Harkins realized that the Choctaw Nation had integrated itself into the southern system of slave labor, which drew the Choctaw planter=class closer to

¹³ “Runaway,” *The Western Star*, March 8, 1851; “Runaway,” *The Western Star*, July 26, 1851; “Runaway,” *The Texas Northern Standard*, September 11, 1852.

¹⁴ “The Choctaw,” *The Liberator*, December 29, 1854.

the South. The *Liberator* might not have taken notice of the Choctaw but for fear that the Choctaw would at some point become a southern state.¹⁵

The first plan that the Choctaw put forward for statehood came from a Choctaw planter named Thompson McKenney. Thompson McKenney attended the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky with other future planters and advocates of statehood like Robert M. Jones and George Harkins. In 1850, McKenney served in the Choctaw Senate with Robert Jones, where the two planters worked together on the committees “on the Constitution” and “on affairs with the United States.” In the Senate, McKenney pushed to change the Choctaws’ political structure to make the Choctaw Nation appear more like a southern state. McKenney wanted the Choctaw to adopt the practice of electing a single governor to replace the four district chiefs that the Choctaw had in 1850. McKenney published his ideas in the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, and even printed a pamphlet about the benefits of his plan that he distributed throughout the nation. McKenney’s plan for a single executive failed when the Choctaw Senate debated it in 1850, but the planter continued to push his idea for statehood.¹⁶

McKenney’s plan for statehood required the Choctaw to unite with the Creek and the Cherokee Nations (the Choctaw had already absorbed the Chickasaw Nation in 1838)¹⁷ to create a single government that controlled the entire Indian Territory. McKenney believed that unifying the Native nations would permit the Native peoples to amass sufficient strength to bargain their way into the United States, which could secure the Choctaw from the

¹⁵ “The Choctaws Taking Action,” *The Liberator*, December 29, 1854.

¹⁶ “Choctaw Council,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, October 30, 1850; Carolyn Thomas Foreman, “The Choctaw Academy,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 6, No. 4 (December, 1928) ; 476; “The Choctaw Council,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, October 23, 1850: “The plan for a single chief was no go...”; “To The Citizens of the Choctaw Nation,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, August 21, 1850; No copy of McKenney’s pamphlet has survived, and it is only mentioned in the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, but not quoted or reprinted.

¹⁷ The Choctaw Constitution, October 1838.

encroaching states and territories that surrounded the nation. This might not have allowed the Choctaw to become completely politically independent, since the Choctaw would have shared a polity with other nations, but the plan guaranteed that the Choctaw would have a government that would hear the Choctaws' voice. McKenney believed that the Choctaw needed the Creek and the Cherokee to attain the requisite 60,000 people needed for a territory to apply for statehood, since the Choctaw Nation possessed no more than 27,000 people [including the Chickasaw] by the Choctaws' own best estimates. McKenney's pragmatic plan excluded the Seminole, however, who had garnered a reputation as people who too readily integrated black people into their midst. The Choctaw planters, who wanted to cooperate with the South, could not afford to associate with the Seminole, nor would they have wanted to, given the Choctaws' earlier tensions with the Seminole during the Redsticks War and the Florida Wars.¹⁸

McKenney's plan appeared in the pages of the *Choctaw Intelligencer* frequently, and received friendly press from editors and contributors. One anonymous contributor vaunted McKenney's plan, and declared that the Choctaw Nation needed to be "admitted as the Indian State of the U.S.A." or the Choctaw would "sink down in impotency and suffer [itself] to be swallowed up by the spreading and grasping policy of the white man." Another article appeared a week later, expounding McKenney's argument for statehood. "We can never look to the acquisition of any other Territory than the one we now occupy," the anonymous writer stated, referencing the fact that the Choctaw had become an enclave, surrounded by American states and territories. A third contributor to the *Choctaw Intelligencer* asked why

¹⁸ "Our Nation," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, March 5, 1851; U.S. Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860*, ed. Joseph C. G. Kennedy, xv.

the Choctaw could not “sit side by side with the States of the Great Union [and] be represented in [the U.S.] Congress?” alluding to the planters’ desire for statehood.¹⁹

The planters worried that if one of the states – the Choctaw feared Arkansas and later Kansas the most – asserted its authority over the Choctaw Nation, then the nation would cease to exist as a politically independent polity. The Choctaw had no place left to go if the nation faced another challenge to its claim to the land and, following, its claim to political independence. The Choctaw planters had no other choice but to stay where they were, to secure the political independence of the Choctaw over the Indian Territory, and to transform a dependent territory into an independent place. To many planters, the idea of statehood seemed like the best way to secure the nation’s political independence.

McKenney marketed his project to the nation in the pages of the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, but he also encouraged the Choctaw government to act upon his fears in some material way. On November 15, 1853, Senator McKenney told the Choctaw General Council – the House and Senate of the Choctaw Nation – that the crisis he had foreseen in 1850 had finally come to bear. McKenney warned the council that the state of Arkansas had set its sights on the Choctaws’ rich cotton lands in the Apukshunnubbee District, and “would sooner or later extend her jurisdiction to her old territorial limits someplace near the mouth of the Kiamichi [River].” This, McKenney said, would force the American government to “again request a cession of a portion of [the Choctaws’] country,” as the U.S. had done two decades earlier. McKenney suggested that the Choctaw Nation formally request a delegate in

¹⁹ “Untitled,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 4, 1850; “Untitled,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 11, 1850; “Thoughts for the People,” *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, March 5, 1851.

the Congress of the United States to guard over the interests of the Choctaw Nation, and to represent the Choctaws' interests in the U.S. Congress.²⁰

Planters, merchants, and slaveholders filled the highest political offices of the General Council (the Choctaw Senate and House working in conjuncture) during the 1850s. The Speaker of the Choctaw House of Representatives, Forbis LeFlore, owned four slaves by 1860; the Leader of the Senate, Israel Folsom, owned twenty; and the Chief of the Apukshunnubbee District, George Harkins, owned nineteen. As such, none of these men took McKenney's warning lightly, because the pro-statehood planter's warning portended peril to other planters' economic livelihoods. As planters, Folsom, LeFlore, and Harkins all understood the gravity of McKenney's words when he warned the council that Arkansas wanted to consume the Choctaw Nation up to the "mouth of the Kiamichi." The Kiamichi River coursed through the heart of the Choctaw Nation's best cotton-lands, and the prosperous town of Doaksville sat on the eastern side of the river, close to Arkansas. Arkansas, the Choctaw planters feared, wanted to rob the Choctaw Nation of the most economically productive segment of the Indian Territory. This would have seriously hindered the Choctaw planters' capacity to access New Orleans and grow cotton, which would have economically stunted the Choctaw Nation's plantation economy. With this in mind, the Choctaw council resolved to send McKenney's request – and hopefully a delegate – to Washington.²¹

²⁰ General Council of the Choctaw Nation, November 15, 1853, Peter P. Pitchlynn Papers, the University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online.

²¹ United States, *Slave Schedules for the Choctaw Nation*, 1860.



Figure 4. Josiah Gregg's "Map of the Indian Territory, Northern Texas, and New Mexico." Doaksville Circled in Red. Map Housed at the University of Northern Texas.

The ostensible goal of McKenney's resolution had been to send a Choctaw delegate to the United States Congress, but the real goal of McKenney's plan had been to introduce the idea of Choctaw statehood to the United States. In a letter to Peter Pitchlynn in 1854, McKenney admitted that he "thought if the [American] government would simply admit [a Choctaw] delegate on the floor of congress to watch the interest of the nation," then in the

course of time, the United States would “become prepared for a change of Government” among the Choctaw, and would ask the Choctaw Nation to become a state. McKenney believed that the Choctaws’ republican government and political acumen would be enough to convince the United States of the “civilization” of the Choctaw, if only the Choctaw Nation had a visible, vocal statesman to demonstrate the changes that the Choctaw planter-class had made to the nation. The United States, however, never responded to McKenney’s resolution, nor admitted a Choctaw a delegate to the United States Congress. But as McKenney’s plan lost steam in 1853, a new plan emerged, inaugurated by the southern states.²²

The Choctaw planters’ best opportunity to transform their nation into a state in the American Union came on February 20, 1854, when Senator Robert Ward Johnson of Arkansas presented a bill before the United States Senate: “A Bill to establish and organize the Territories of Cha-ta-kee, Mus-cogee, and Chah-ta.” Senator Johnson, an Arkansan planter, expressed concern over the future of slavery in 1850, when Congress admitted California into the Union as a free state. Johnson’s territory bill aimed to restructure the relationship between the United States and the Native nations of Indian Territory, and give the slave owning Choctaws, Creeks, and Cherokees a voice in the American government. Johnson hoped that his bill would net the southern states at least two more southern senators, one more congressmen, and help secure slavery in the border states. “We think such a step absolutely necessary for the protection of the South,” one newspaper man from Arkansas said

²² Thompson McKenney to Peter P. Pitchlynn, February 14, 1854, Peter P. Pitchlynn Papers, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online.

in response to the bill. “The Choctaws and Cherokees are slaveholders, and would add another slaveholding state to the confederacy.”²³

Robert Ward Johnson had a history with the Choctaw people, and knew about their plantations, their republic, and their pro-slavery stance. The Senator’s uncle, Richard M. Johnson, operated the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky, and taught men like Thompson McKenney, Robert Jones, and George Harkins, who became the leading men of the Choctaw Nation. As a child, Robert Johnson attended the Choctaw Academy under his uncle’s tutelage, and met the future political leaders of the Choctaw Nation. Johnson would have socialized with these young men, learned about them, spoke with them, played with them, and gotten to know them. Likely, Johnson remembered the young Choctaws he attended school with when the South needed to extend its political reach.²⁴

Johnson’s bill posited that the Choctaw – as well as the Cherokee and Creek – should have been allowed to organize themselves into three “organized-territories” of the United States, but only if they agreed to meet certain conditions. First, the nations would have to elect governors in place of principle or district chiefs. Second, the nations would have to adopt a bicameral legislature with a House of Representatives and a Senate. The Choctaw already possessed a bicameral legislature, and Thompson McKenney had pushed the Choctaw to adopt a single executive since at least 1850. Afterwards, the three new territories would be allowed to send elected delegates of their choice to the United States Congress, to represent the interest of said territories. Afterwards, if the three territories agreed to unify into

²³ “A Bill to Establish and Organize the Territories of Cha-tah-kee, Mus-cogee, and Chah-ta,” (S. 221), February 20, 1854; “A New Slave State,” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 19, 1857 [article reprinted from the *Memphis Enquirer*].

²⁴ Elsie M. Lewis, “Robert Ward Johnson: Militant Spokesman of the Old-South-West,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (spring, 1954), 17.

a single, territory wide government, then the Native peoples could jointly apply for statehood, and unite into a single state called Neosho.²⁵

Johnson's bill copied McKenney's plan for Choctaw statehood, but the Choctaw planters recoiled at some of the suggestions that Johnson had made. Robert M. Jones supported the bill, and the idea of Choctaw statehood. The planter even made a two hour speech on the subject of Johnson's Territory Bill before the General Council in the hopes that the Choctaw would "wake up and do something." Unfortunately, the contents of Jones's pro-statehood speech have been lost. Yet for all his zeal for the project, Jones expressed repugnance when confronted with the idea that the Choctaw had to share their government with the Creeks and the Cherokees. Jones attempted to use the political reciprocity that he had built up over the years with Peter Pitchlynn in order to remove what Jones considered the worst component of Johnson's bill. Jones instructed Pitchlynn to "get [honorable] Johnson to change that part of the bill" that forced the Choctaw to combine themselves with the Cherokee and Creek in order to become a state. Jones did not believe that the arrangement suited the Choctaw, and wanted to emphasize that the Choctaw had a "right to become a state single and alone." Unlike McKenney, Jones did not like the idea of cooperative statehood with other Native peoples, but he did like the idea of statehood.²⁶

Jones never explicitly stated why he supported Johnson's bill, but he did say that he expected it to "produce mighty change among dry bones." Jones, a man familiar with the Bible, referenced the book of Ezekiel when he spoke of "dry bones." The book references the

²⁵ "A Bill to Establish and Organize the Territories of Cha-tah-kee, Mus-cogee, and Chah-ta," (S. 221), February 20, 1854; The Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, November 10, 1842

²⁶ Robert M. Jones to Peter P. Pitchlynn, November 6, 1854, Peter P. Pitchlynn Papers, The University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online.

rejuvenation of Israel, the deliverance of the Israelites, God's people, from the "heathens" on all sides of them, and how God sanctified Israel, and guarded over "the land." The Choctaw had themselves been surrounded on all sides by the 1850s, and some believed that the nation would be destroyed if it did not transform itself. Jones might have believed that statehood would rejuvenate the "dry bones" of the Choctaw Nation, and guard it from American settlers as God had guarded Israel from the "heathens."²⁷

Chief George Harkins expressed his reasons for supporting statehood when he addressed the Choctaw General Council on the matter of Johnson's bill. Harkins carefully selected his words to remind the Choctaw lawmakers about the insecurity of the Choctaws' political independence, and the Choctaw's diminutive, colonial status to the United States. Harkins' told the General Council that the United States thought about the Choctaw as "wards" or "children," something that the Choctaw chief found particularly odious, especially given the Choctaws' republican government and market acumen. Harkins believed that if the Choctaw Nation became a state, then the Choctaw could graduate in the American imagination from "child" to equal, and gain a measure of security over their political independence as the "free and independent State of Chah-ta," the name Johnson posited for the Choctaws' territorial government. In 1854, the Choctaw council agreed to select a committee to debate the merit of the bill, and decide the nation's course of action.²⁸

²⁷ Robert M. Jones to Peter P. Pitchlynn, January 26, 1855, Peter P. Pitchlynn Papers, The University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online.

²⁸ "Three New Sates – An Important Movement among the Choctaw," *Democrat and Sentinel*, December 21, 1854; Choctaw Nation, "Resolution in relation to the Territorial Bill and Railroads," *Acts and Resolutions of the General Council of the Choctaw Nation, from 1852 – 1857* (Fort Smith: Josephus Dotson, Printer for the Nation, 1858), 71.

During the late 1850s, southern newspapers heralded the inevitable emergence of a Choctaw state while anti-slavery newspapers bemoaned the Choctaws' decision to ally themselves so closely with the South. The *Liberator* berated George Harkins for urging the Choctaw to "adopt Johnson's territorial bill," and the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* warned its readers about the possibility of a new slave state. However, while the abolitionist papers stood aghast at the Choctaws' political direction, the *Fort Smith Herald*, an Arkansan newspaper applauded the Choctaw, and praised Harkins for his "reasonable" approach to Johnson's bill. "We may safely conclude," the paper reported, "that [the Choctaw Nation] will become *one of us...*" – an American state. The writer further vaunted Chief Harkins, and declared an eagerness to welcome the Colonel into the southern fold as a "member of Congress from the State of Chata." In 1858, the *Fort Smith Times* reported again on the "bright and glowing future" of the Choctaw Nation, which Arkansans believed would "claim for itself immediate kin with the Territories and States of this great and growing Confederacy." Even the President of the United States, James Buchanan, weighed in on the possibility of Choctaw statehood, and said that "at no very distant day [the Choctaw] will be incorporated into the Union as one of the Sovereign States." With southern encouragement, some planters began to prepare the Choctaw Nation for statehood.²⁹

On January 5, 1857, Tandy Walker, a Choctaw slaveholder and graduate of the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky, presided over a constitutional convention in Skullyville, Choctaw Nation, to draft a new constitution. Walker, posited one Arkansas newspaper, went

²⁹ "A New Slave State," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 19, 1857; "Three New States – An Important Movement among the Choctaw," *Democrat and Sentinel*, December 21, 1854; "The Choctaws and Slavery," *Wilmington Journal*, December 29, 1854 [both papers reprinted the story from the *Fort Smith Herald*]; "Arkansas News," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, October 3, 1858; Jacob Folsom to Peter Pitchlynn, January 19, 1858, Peter P. Pitchlynn Collection, University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online [Jacob Folsom was quoting an issue of the *National Intelligencer* that he received to talk about President Buchanan.]

“the whole hog for slavery,” and challenged readers to visit Walker’s plantation near Skullyville if they harbored any doubts. Walker’s new constitution – the Skullyville Constitution – covered key issues raised in Johnson’s bill. The Skullyville Constitution changed the Choctaws’ executive branch from a confederate model to a single executive model, with a governor who took the place of the three district chiefs. However, many of the Choctaw recoiled from the idea of a single executive. Enough Choctaw remembered that the last man who held sole executive authority over the nation, Greenwood LeFlore, used his authority to acquiesce to Removal. The fear of an abuse of power poisoned the constitution of 1857 from the beginning. The new constitution also prohibited the Choctaw from making any laws to abolish slavery, and clearly stated the Choctaws’ stance on the issue of slavery in the Choctaw Nation and in the American territories. Any migrant to the Choctaw Nation – although the Choctaw had tough laws against unwelcome American migrants – would be permitted to bring their human property into the nation. This “safe on slavery” approach allowed the Choctaw to wade into the debate about slavery in the territories, and assured the southern states of the Choctaw planters’ solid adherence to the “peculiar institution.”³⁰

By 1860, Johnson’s bill had effectively died in the U.S. Congress, and the Choctaw wrote a new constitution, the Doaksville Constitution, which overturned the changes made by the Skullyville document. Johnson’s bill never came to a vote, and starved due to the sectional strife that consumed America during the 1850s. The North likely did not want to vote in a new slave state, too many southerners might have thought about the Choctaw as “wandering savages” to treat the proposed “Indian State” seriously. In the Choctaw Nation,

³⁰ Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, January 5, 1857; “Untitled,” *The Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, January 30, 1858; Duane Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments Among the Cherokee, The Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 188 – 191.

the planters' pro state constitution died for two reasons. First, most Choctaw violently rejected the idea of a single executive, and returned to their divisional model in 1860. Second, the Skullyville Constitution never came up for a popular vote, which caused even the pro state Choctaw George Harkins to oppose the new document on principle.³¹

The Choctaw planters' ambition to become a state, although stalled, did not die in 1860. By 1861, the political debate over slavery in the territories came to its end when eleven southern states declared the Union between themselves and the United States dissolved. The Choctaw planters had said in 1850 that if the Union dissolved, then the Choctaw would be freed from their prior treaties and contracts.³² True to their words, the Choctaw planters stated that when the southern states left the Union, the Choctaw were "free to act for themselves," and declared the nation "absolutely and unconditionally free and independent [...] aside from any earthly power." Immediately afterwards, the Choctaw planters worked to secure a treaty of "alliance and amity" with the new Southern Confederacy. Ostensibly, the Choctaw wanted military protection from the "abolitionist hordes" of the newly elected American President, Abraham Lincoln. But the planters had ulterior motives to support the newly formed Confederacy. Robert McDonald Jones harangued anyone who wanted to remain neutral in the American conflict, and publicly threatened to hang Choctaw lawmakers who opposed an alliance with the Confederacy. Jones had become too dependent on the South to go without access to southern markets – his cotton needed a market, his steamboats

³¹ George W. Harkins to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 3, 1858, Letters Received by the office of Indian Affairs, 1824 – 1881, Choctaw Agency, 1824 – 1876, 1857 – 1859, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City; the Choctaw Constitution, 1860.

³² "Untitled," *The Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 4, 1851.

needed a river, and his stores needed goods. If the Choctaw planters lost their access to New Orleans, they might have also lost their significant political and economic powers.³³

While economic necessity drove men like Jones to seek an alliance with the Confederacy, the Choctaw planters also embraced the southern cause because the confederates promised to make the Choctaw Nation into a Confederate state. Robert Jones acted as the political envoy to the Confederacy's agent, Albert Pike. The two men and their respective entourages met in the Choctaw Nation on July 14, 1861. Pike, an Arkansan who had worked with Robert Ward Johnson in the 1850s and in the Confederate Congress, knew that the planter class desired statehood. Article XXVII of Pike's treaty promised that when the Choctaw declared "its desire to become a State of the Confederacy, the whole [...] country [...] shall be received and admitted into the Confederacy as one of the Confederate States, on equal terms in all respects with the original States, without regard to population." Robert M. Jones agreed to the terms, signed the bill, and cemented his path to becoming the Choctaw's first and only representative to the Confederate Congress.³⁴

For ten years, the Choctaw planter-class agitated for statehood. The planters wanted the Choctaw Nation to become a state for a variety of reasons. First, the planters believed that statehood presented a way to permanently affix the Choctaw Nation upon the American geopolitical landscape, and guarantee the Choctaw Nation's political-independence from the other states. Second, the Choctaw had been engrossed in the same system of slavery as the

³³ "Acts and Resolutions passed at the called Session of the General Council of the Choctaw Nation, in June 1861," *Choctaw Manuscript Materials*, Peter P. Pitchlynn Collection, The University of Oklahoma Western History Collections Online; Annie Heloise Abel, *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist: An Omitted Chapter in the Diplomatic history of the Southern Confederacy* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1915), 645.

³⁴ Confederate States, *Journal of the Confederate Congress*, Volume 6, page 27; United States, *The War of Rebellion*, Series 4, Volume 1, page 453; Walter Lee Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 362 – 363.

South, and had developed a similar governmental model to the southern-states. This created commonalities and common-interests between the Choctaw planters and the southern elites. By 1850, men like Robert Jones, Thompson McKenney, and George Harkins remained politically-loyal to the Choctaw as a political-entity, but had become distinctively southern in their economic concerns. By becoming a southern state, the Choctaw planters sought to kill two issues with one blow. The Choctaw would secure their political-independence as the “free and independent state of Chat-ah,” but would also secure their place among their southern-allies, and become a fully integrated part of the South’s political and economic institutions.

Conclusion

The Choctaw-Confederate alliance did not induct the Choctaw planters into southern history. Rather, when Robert Jones signed Albert Pike's treaty, and later became a delegate to the Confederate Congress, he consummated a long-standing history between the Choctaw planters and the Southern U.S. Neither the South nor the planters possessed exactly the same core-motives, but both accepted the dictates of the global-market, which both parties depended on. This created the common-ground that Choctaw planters and southerners stood upon, but allowed both parties to retain their distinctiveness, even as their histories overlapped.

For the Choctaw planters, the initial motive to undertake a nation-building project had been to protect the Choctaw's political-independence, to secure for the Choctaw a "free and independent government." To this end, the Choctaw planters transformed their national-government and attempted to change the Choctaw people from kinsmen into market-oriented citizens. The planters took advantage of the cotton-boom to amass wealth and power. The planters then adopted the government of the states that surrounded them in order to erect a republican nation-state. These changes made the Choctaw Nation appear more American – more southern. But the Choctaw planters did not emulate the political-model of their neighbors because the planters admired the states, but because the planters feared the states. Thus, the early projects of the Choctaw planters like Greenwood LeFlore and David Folsom had been born out of fear, and the Choctaw Nation rose from of a dialectical-exchange between land-hungry southern planters, American settlers, the U.S. government, and

concerned Choctaws who wanted to remain in the lands that surrounded Nanih Waiya – the place of the Choctaw’s emergence.

Afterwards, Mississippi secured the removal of the Choctaw from the political borders of the state in 1832 as the cotton-boom continued to sweep the South, and immersed the region in a global-system of capitalist-exchange predicated on cotton and slavery. When this occurred, a rising generation of Choctaw planters, products of the earlier nation-building projects, exploited the southern-marketplace to suit their own purposes. Power flowed in the form of white bales of cotton laden on steamboats that sailed between Doaksville and New Orleans, enriching planters like Robert Jones, who rose to political-prominence by the force of his economic-might alone. This new market-oriented environment allowed the planters to advertise their polity to the South, to shape how Americans thought about “Choctaw” with newspaper stories about the Choctaw’s homes and pictures that symbolized the nation’s mastery of “civilization.” But when the Choctaw planters inserted themselves into the same economic-systems as the South, they became dependent on the same tools as the South. The Choctaw planters had risen to power on the backs of slave-labor and cotton, and their power continued to rely on slave-labor and cotton during the 1850s and 1860s.

By the 1850s, the Choctaw planters had become completely reliant on the world-market, but retained the original goal of the Choctaw planters’ first nation-building project, to secure the Choctaw a “free and independent government.” In 1850, both the Choctaw planter and the southern planters experienced simultaneous crises to their ways of life. These crises had been precipitated by the Mexican-American War, which brought large swaths of new territory under America’s jurisdiction. The Choctaw planters feared that the Choctaw – now completely surrounded by American states and territories – had no place to go if the

U.S. government, or a state, forced the Choctaw to surrender their political-independence. The planters needed to find a means to permanently entrench the Choctaw Nation onto the American political-landscape as an exclusively Choctaw political-place. At the same time, southerners failed to open many of the new territories to slavery, and began to hunt for new slave territories to transform into new slave-states. Both Choctaws planters and southern lawmakers struck upon the same idea of integrating the Choctaw into the United States as a slave-state – a testament to the common-interests the Choctaw planters and the southern planters had developed while bound to the same forces of global-capitalism. For the Choctaw planters, statehood provided a way to create a permanent Choctaw home where the Choctaw could continue to govern themselves and control their own lands. For the South, Choctaw statehood would provide two pro-slavery senators, and help secure the borders of slavery.

By 1861, the planters' projects evolved into their final form when eleven southern states broke away from the Union and formally declared themselves the Confederate States of America. The Choctaw planters, bound to the South, dissolved their treaties with the United States, and entered into a new compact with the Southern Confederacy, which offered the republican, pro-slavery Choctaw planters a representative to the Confederate Congress, and the promise of eventual Confederate statehood. Yet through all these changes that occurred when the Choctaw planters integrated themselves into the southern-market and adopted southern political and labor-institutions, the Choctaw planters remained politically loyal to the idea of an independent Choctaw polity.

Southern history and Choctaw history do blend together, but they never become indistinguishable. Historians can study the Choctaw planters as immersed in the larger history of the South without obliterating the Choctaw's distinctiveness. But to study the

Choctaw planters apart from Southern history is to ignore the forces that drove and shaped their activities, and makes incomprehensible the Choctaw planters' affinity for the South during the 1850s and, ultimately, the U.S. Civil War.

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