

Key Vocabulary

Reconstruction Treaties

Freedpeople (or Freedmen)

Treaty of Medicine Lodge

Reservation System

1871 Indian Appropriations Act

pacifism

Washita Massacre

assimilation

Chilocco Indian School

Dorothy Sunrise v. Cache Consolidated School District No. 1

Buffalo Soldiers

Homestead Act of 1862

Manifest Destiny

industrialization

Learning Outcomes:

The learner will be able to...

- Summarize the impact of the Reconstruction treaties on the Five Tribes.
- Describe how federal Indian policy after 1877 led to a second wave of tribal removals.
- Summarize the intent and function of the reservation system.
- Explain how tribal identity and culture were impacted by federal Indian boarding school policy.
- Describe the impact of the railroads and cattle industry in Oklahoma following the Civil War.

Compelling Question:

- To what extent did Reconstruction impact tribal sovereignty in Indian Territory?

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, learners will explore the significance of the Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory. The Five Tribes were forced to sign new treaties in 1866 following the Civil War. We will read about this time period as one of competing visions for who should control the land and what would become of it in the twentieth century.

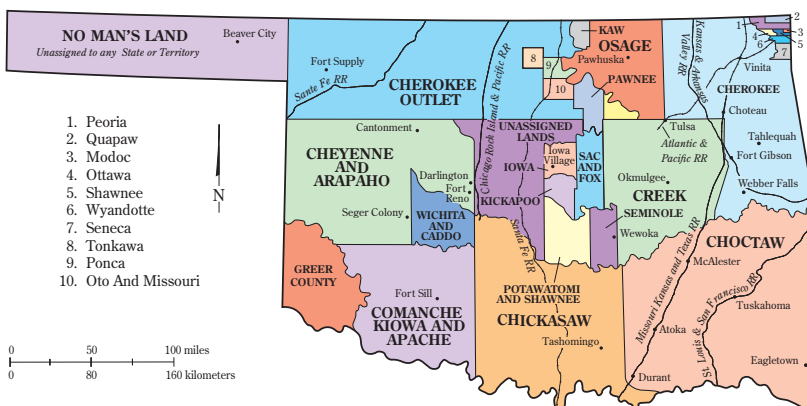
The Civil War ended in 1865 with a Union victory when Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered the last of his troops to the Union army. The period that followed is often called the Reconstruction era. Reconstruction was an effort to unify the country, address the situation of formerly enslaved people who were newly freed, and determine how the country could move forward after such a bitter and deadly war.

Reconstruction

After the political and physical devastation of the Civil War, plans had to be made to “reconstruct” the southern states. In his second inaugural address in 1865, President Lincoln set the tone for Reconstruction, and called for the nation to come together “with malice toward none; with charity for all” in order to “achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace.” Lincoln died only forty-one days later. With him went many of the hopes for a peacefully rebuilt South. The results of the Civil War included the displacement of four million formerly enslaved people. It also caused the region to collapse economically. The population of the South decreased significantly due to the death toll during the Civil War and the departure of many African Americans from the region.

Lincoln’s reconstruction plan offered amnesty, or pardon, to white southerners who pledged loyalty to the United States and accepted the elimination of slavery. Southerners would be free to rebuild their state governments as a result. But Congress wanted to punish the South for the devastation they had caused. They wanted more than 50 percent of each state’s population to pledge loyalty.

Immediately after the Civil War ended, friction arose over the process of Reconstruction. This included tensions over the rights for African Americans and the punishment of southerners who had sided with the Confederacy. On one side were the new “Black Codes” of state legislatures. These tried to keep former slaves in powerless positions and as close to slavery as possible. The Fourteenth Amendment was on the other side. It offered citizenship regardless of race. Some people still sought to profit from poor white and Black southerners. “Carpetbaggers” moved in to rebuild the southern economy and infrastructure. They redistributed the land in a way that often perpetuated old systems. Newly freed Black people kept working in extreme poverty on white-owned land. These were the conditions many African Americans experienced before they moved to Oklahoma.

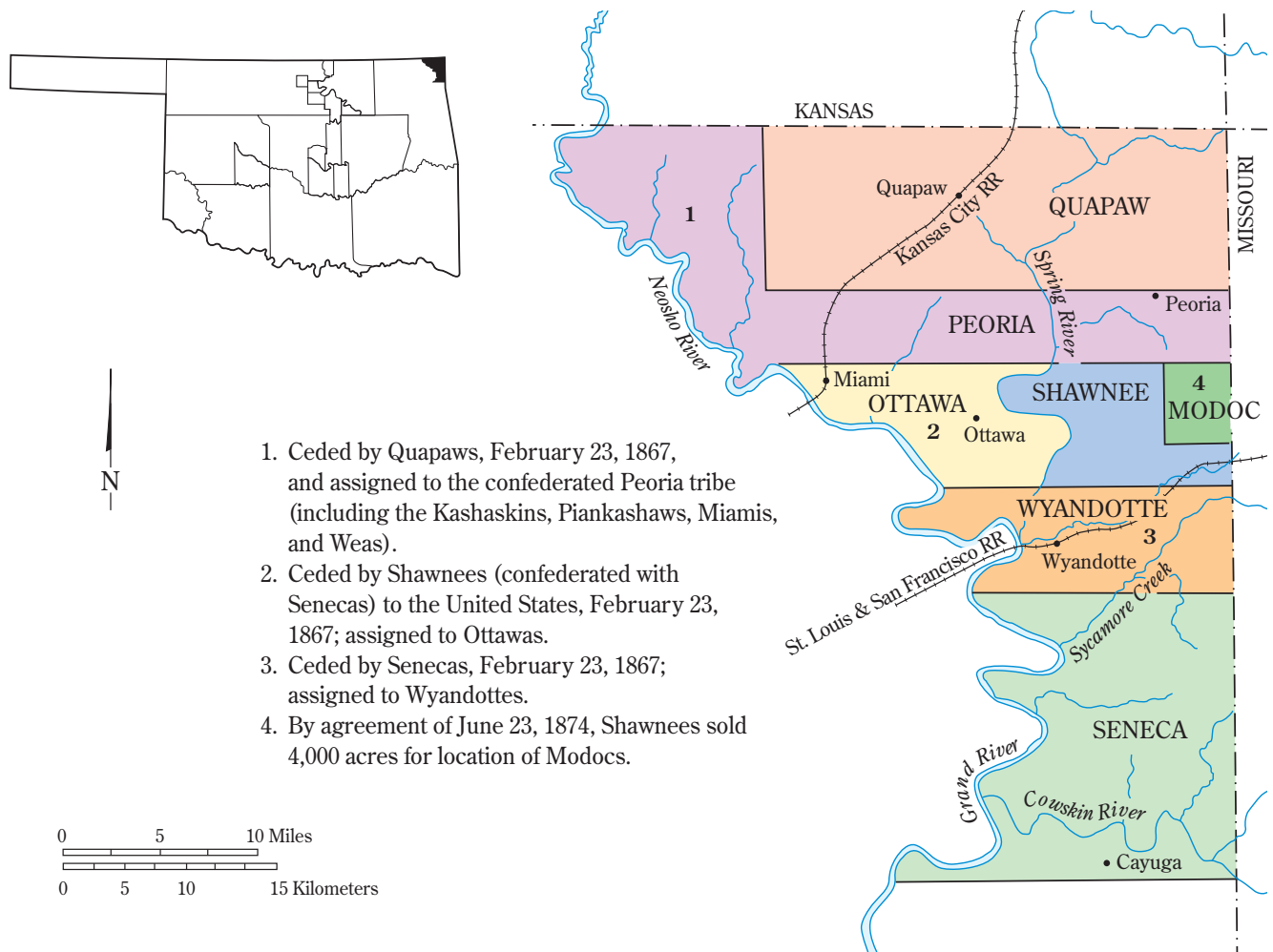


Map 4.1: Indian Territory after the Civil War, 1866–89. The Reconstruction Treaties paved the way for land to be taken from the Five Tribes and opened to white settlement. Additional tribes were also removed to Oklahoma in the late nineteenth century. This meant that the map of tribal land would change significantly in the following decades.

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The Civil War and its aftermath would shape the future of Indian Territory, as well as the rest of the country, across several generations. The **Reconstruction Treaties** of 1866 took more land from Indigenous people in Indian Territory. Land was eventually opened to new settlement. Tensions increased between tribes, especially as the Second Indian Removal took place. Indian Territory quickly became a place of hope for some and frustration for others. The Reconstruction era would last until 1877.

Present-day Oklahoma grew out of decisions made at the end of the Civil War. Ideas about land rights (still influenced by the Doctrine of Discovery) and common attitudes about race influenced major decisions. After Ulysses S. Grant became president in 1877, new federal policies toward Indigenous people had important implications for Oklahoma. Poor people of various racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds began to look at Oklahoma as a place for new beginnings. Those already living in Oklahoma when the Civil War ended could not have anticipated the influx of newcomers and plans for statehood that would emerge in the final decades of the nineteenth century. As their contact with Europeans increased, members of each of these Native nations found ways to connect their traditional beliefs to Christianity and to monotheism, or the belief in a single god. Some southeastern Indigenous people actually converted to Christianity, but they found ways to blend both sets of beliefs. Ceremonial, Christian, and blended traditions continue among tribal communities today.



Map 4.2: Native nations in the northeastern corner of Indian Territory, 1867–1874. Ownership of land in Indian Territory changed a lot during this period, as this map shows. The situation intensified when non-Native settlers started to come in from Kansas and other areas.

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Reconstruction Treaties

As we saw in the last chapter, the Civil War caused tension within the Five Tribes as tribal members found themselves on opposing sides. Even though some tribal nations remained loyal to the United States, the Five Tribes were forced to sign new treaties at the end of the war. Three important conditions came out of these 1866 treaties. First, the Five Tribes had to give up a substantial amount of land. Prior to the war, the Five Tribes held land that spread across most of present-day Oklahoma. The Reconstruction Treaties decreased their land holdings to roughly the eastern half of Oklahoma. Now newly opened lands would be available for non-Native settlement. Second, the treaties undermined tribal sovereignty and governance. The federal government justified its policies as punishment for the tribes' supporting the Confederacy, even though that support was neither universal nor constant. Third, the treaties addressed the status of people who had been enslaved by some members of the Five Tribes.

Freedpeople (or Freedmen) were formerly enslaved people who were set free at the end of the Civil War. They were men, women, and children who had been considered property. Formerly enslaved people in Indian Territory had been the property of individual members of the Five Tribes. They were emancipated or freed after the Civil War. Nationally, there were nearly four million enslaved Black people who were freed at the end of the war. Their status was addressed by multiple amendments to the US Constitution and several state and federal laws. But Freedpeople in Indian Territory had a different experience. They too were freed from slavery by provisions in the Reconstruction Treaties and given some degree of rights. For example, Cherokee, Muscogee, and Seminole Freedpeople were given tribal citizenship and the same rights as other tribal members. Chickasaw and Choctaw Freedpeople could choose between being relocated elsewhere or becoming citizens of the tribes who had enslaved them. Those Freedpeople who chose tribal citizenship became eligible, along with their families, for land allotments a few decades later.



Fig. 4.1: Chickasaw Freedpeople applying for land allotments in Tishomingo, Indian Territory, in the early twentieth century. The Chickasaw Reconstruction Treaty included provisions for Freedpeople to receive land allotments.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Allotment

In 1887, Congress passed the General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act. This and later acts required Native Americans to “enroll” as tribal members under the supervision of government commissions, such as the Jerome Commission and the Dawes Commission. Once enrolled, a tribal member received an allotment of 160-acres. The parceling out of Native land that had been collectively held (owned by the whole tribe) created a “surplus” of land. The federal government sold the newly available land to railroad companies and non-Native settlers. The allotment process included the possibility for individual allottees to eventually become US citizens, but it also restricted their rights to sell property. Allotment further complicated the role of tribes in determining their own membership. As a result of this legislation, Native nations lost millions of acres of land and faced continued efforts to undermine their sovereignty.

The loss of land that resulted from the Reconstruction Treaties had a major impact on the tribes and their economic well-being. The Seminoles, for example, were forced to sell their land (2,169,080 acres) to the federal government for 15 cents an acre and then purchase a smaller amount of land (200,000 acres) for \$1.50 an acre. Other tribes gave up substantial portions of land. Sometimes, like the Seminoles, they were compelled to sell land. Sometimes they were forced to cede (give up) the land or allow others to move onto their land with them. The Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Muscogees had to cede the western halves of their land. The Cherokees gave up land known as the Cherokee Outlet (also known as the Cherokee Strip) and had to accept the resettlement of other Indigenous people in the Cherokee Outlet lands. Altogether the Reconstruction Treaties resulted in the Five Tribes giving up claims to the western half of present-day Oklahoma.

Indian Territory was under military occupation during this time, similar to the military occupation of the South during Reconstruction. The conditions were particularly grim during and immediately after the war because of food shortages, looting, and ongoing problems of disease. Nevertheless, the Five Tribes looked to find a way forward as they continued strengthening their governments and building new schools, churches, and businesses.

Plains Tribes and the Reservation System

Plains tribes, who were already living in Indian Territory, anticipated some of the difficulties that lay ahead. The loss of land and influx of newcomers were central concerns, but shifting government policies toward Native Americans further complicated their situation. In 1851, ten years before the start of the Civil War, the federal government established two large reservations, one in the Dakotas and one in present-day Oklahoma, for Indigenous Plains people. In recognition of the challenges faced by Indigenous people, who occupied smaller and smaller amounts of land, federal policies included provisions for education and food supplies. However, corruption among US government officials who oversaw programs and poor communication between these officials and the tribes led to multiple problems with this arrangement.



The 1867 **Treaty of Medicine Lodge** included separate agreements signed by the Comanches and Kiowas, the Kiowa-Apaches, and the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahos.

Each of these agreements required the tribes to move onto reservation land. Southern Plains tribes had not wanted to do this because they enjoyed being able to move freely over large areas of land. When forced onto reservations, they could not continue living as they once had. Out of frustration, some turned to raiding white settlements for food, supplies, and horses.

Fig. 4.2: Satank, also known as Sitting Bear, was the Chief of the Kiowa Tribe. He was also one of the signers of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge. This photo of the Kiowa chief was taken in 1867, the same year as the treaty signing.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The idea behind the **Reservation System** was to place Indigenous people on smaller areas of land and “civilize” them through formal education and religious instruction. However, the government quickly found that there were numerous problems with this approach. First, much of that reservation land set aside for Indigenous people did in fact become desirable to white settlers, and there was little political will in Washington, DC, to protect Native land titles. Second, schools, especially boarding schools, were expensive to run. Third, there was a shocking amount of corruption and incompetence among non-Indigenous agents who were appointed by the US government and were supposed to be acting in the best interest of Indigenous people. Plains tribes living on reservations found that Indian agents did not always provide them the promised rations. Sometimes they received less food than was expected, or the rations were spoiled. The **1871 Indian Appropriations Act** further undermined efforts by Indigenous leaders to protest conditions on reservations. This act ended the recognized sovereign status of Native nations, instead characterizing Native Americans as individual people and wards of the government.

President Grant tried to address these and other problems by appointing Indian agents who were Quakers. Quakers seemed like ideal mediators because of their pacifism, or opposition to war or violence of any kind, and their presumed honesty. As a result of the president’s “Peace Policy,” numerous Quakers came to play an important role as Indian agents and missionaries in Indian Territory. Unfortunately, their presence did not end the corrupt practices that took food and money from the hands of Oklahoma’s Indigenous people. Nor did it solve the problems with poor communication.



Fig. 4.3: General Superintendency of Indian Agents, 1872. Often Indian agents worked with one specific tribe or group whereas superintendents were in charge of a larger area. This meant they did not work as directly with tribes and did not spend a lot of time with single tribes. Each superintendent managed multiple Indian agents.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The Second Indian Removal and supply problems led to numerous conflicts between the tribes and white settlers. There were also clashes between the tribes and the army troops stationed in the area. Various Plains tribes were frustrated by the corruption in reservation management and the aggressive actions of the military.

Jones Family Indian Ring

Native nations experienced many difficulties due to the expanding control of the federal government over their affairs. In many cases the government forced the tribes to sign treaties that diminished their lands. Now the tribes no longer had access to their lands for hunting, fishing, and farming. To compensate them for these losses, the treaties promised supplies such as food and clothing. Unfortunately, the process of distributing these goods to the tribes was often corrupt.

Indian agent Hiram Jones of the Quapaw Agency is an example of such corruption. The Quapaw Agency was responsible for supervising a number of tribes in present-day northeastern Oklahoma. These tribes included the Modocs, Peorias, Eastern Shawnees, Miamis, Ottawas, Senecas, and Wyandottes. Jones had the job of distributing government supplies to these tribes. Instead, Jones worked with a man named Enoch Hoag to withhold goods from the tribes. Hoag was superintendent of the Central Indian Department and a cousin to the wife of Jones. The two men funneled business to another family member to cover up their actions. In the Quapaw Agency, eleven of the twelve agency employees were relatives of Agent Jones or Superintendent Hoag. Due to such corruption and negligence, the tribes suffered poor health, malnutrition, and premature death. The Modocs in particular suffered a severe population decline under Jones's supervision.

These tensions led to a series of conflicts, including the Washita Massacre, which took place in western Oklahoma.



Map 4.3: The Washita Massacre site and the movements of General Custer's troops

Courtesy of Brad Watkins, PhD.

The Washita Massacre

In the summer of 1868, Cheyenne tribal members conducted several violent and deadly raids in Oklahoma and Kansas. The raids were a direct result of Indigenous people having too little food and too few supplies. They were also growing more and more weary of repeated removals. In response to the Cheyenne raids and other conflicts, the federal government sent army troops to stop the raids and force tribes back onto reservations when they tried to leave them. These were not easy tasks. At the same time the US government was trying to convince more people from the East to move west, so it became even more important to the government to contain the so-called Indian problem. This in turn put the army, especially its cavalry units, in direct conflict with Indigenous tribes.

General Phillip H. Sheridan grew frustrated over the difficulty of stopping the raids. He believed that Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, a veteran of the Civil War, was the best military leader to put an end to the raids.

Sheridan requested that Custer be reinstated with the Seventh Cavalry just ten months after he had been convicted of desertion and mistreatment of his soldiers. His one-year suspension ended early, and he was sent out west to stop the raids. His main target was Arapahos and Cheyennes believed to be responsible for the raids earlier that summer.

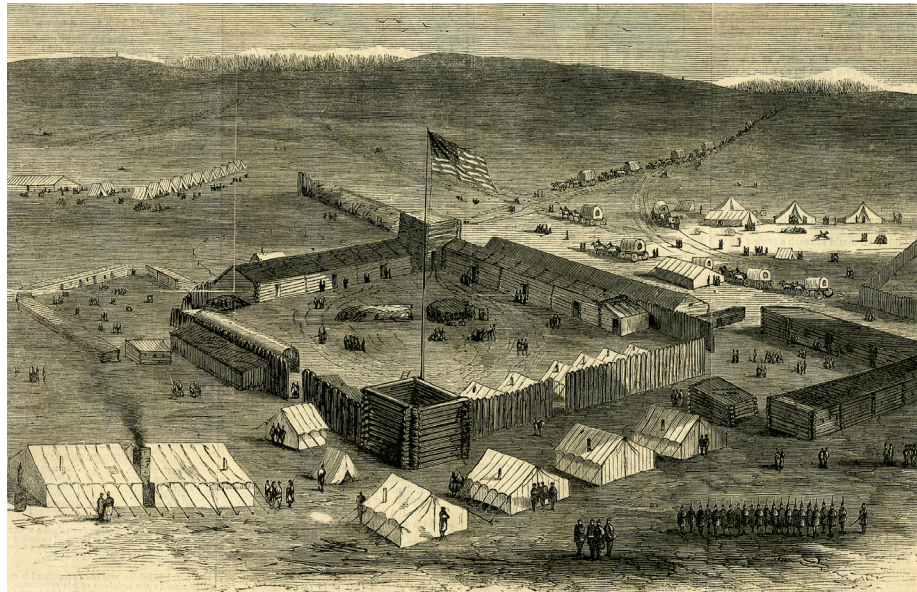
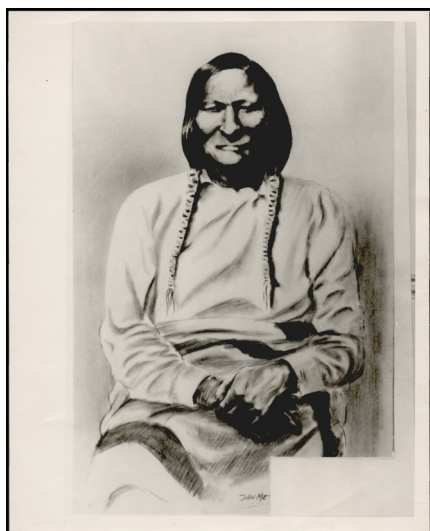


Fig. 4.4: Established in 1868, Fort Supply served as the supply base for Major General Philip H. Sheridan as soldiers patrolled the region. Troops escorted cattle drives along the trails.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



In November 1868, Custer found what he thought he was looking for when his scouts discovered an encampment along the Washita River just outside present-day Cheyenne, Oklahoma. However, neither he nor his men verified the band's identity. That band was actually a peaceful one, and there were several indications that the tribe posed no threat. Their leader, Black Kettle, was a peace chief who, along with his wife, Medicine Woman Later, and many of his followers, had survived a morning attack by US soldiers in Colorado Territory four years earlier. That vicious attack is known today as the Sand Creek Massacre. Now Black Kettle was trying to adhere to new treaty requirements and move his band to their assigned reservation lands. He had been promised safe passage by the US commander of Fort Cobb, located near the Washita River. He had a white flag flying over the main dwelling in the camp, which indicated peace.

Fig. 4.5: Black Kettle, the Southern Cheyenne peace chief. Although he was a warrior in the past, he shifted his focus to maintaining peace with the US government as well as with other tribes. Soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry, led by Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, shot and killed Black Kettle while he was attempting to escape the fighting at Washita .

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

None of these signs mattered to the soldiers as they planned their attack. Custer sent four columns of the Seventh Cavalry to attack the camp at dawn on November 27. Nearby settlements of Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Kiowas responded to the sounds of attack, but it was over too quickly for them to stop it. Just over one hundred Cheyennes were killed, including Black Kettle. In addition, Custer ordered the slaughtering of more than 800 horses belonging to the band. His goal was to destroy anything that the band's survivors could use to defend themselves in the future.

Custer claimed that only Cheyenne men were killed, but Cheyenne reports indicated that among those who died, only eleven were men while the rest were women and children. Despite Custer's claim of great victory at the Washita, eyewitness accounts reveal a more complicated and tragic story. Mothers and children were terrorized and killed as the attack unfolded. Eight-year-old Amithneh (Cheyenne) recalled her mother yelling at her to run and not look back. Amithneh's mother was shot in the back, and as she fell, she told her daughter to take care of her siblings. Amithneh said, "I looked back to my mother and she had her face to the ground." The young girl knew then that her mother was dead. She kept running. Other accounts also described the atmosphere of terror as many people, including children, were shot to death while trying to escape the fighting.



The events at Washita highlight some of the larger issues that characterized this period of hostilities between tribes and the army. They also speak to the tragedy of poor communication. Different versions of these events continue to be debated today, but it is clear that in his accounts Custer left out many important and painful details about what happened that November day. General Sheridan saw the Washita strategy as a success, and its outcome increased his belief that the best time to attack tribes was when they were settled and less mobile during winter camp. This led to more winter campaigns against tribes who were blamed for raids or for leaving reservation lands.

Fig. 4.6: General Philip Sheridan joined the US Army in 1854 and stayed in its ranks until his death in 1888. He was the commander of the Army Department of the Missouri from 1868 to 1869. Sheridan appointed Lt. Col. Custer to lead to winter campaign which led to the Washita Massacre in 1868.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Second Indian Removal

Oklahoma tribes continued to face serious challenges in the second half of the nineteenth century. Along with the Five Tribes, Plains tribes like the Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, Cheyennes, Wichitas, and Osages found themselves facing encroachment, or unauthorized intrusion, onto their land. This happened when squatters, who were often extremely poor whites, moved onto their land illegally. Meanwhile, the tribes endured new rounds of forced removal.

Ever since Indian Territory had been designated as Indigenous reservation lands, states like Kansas and California called on the government to move tribes from their states to Indian Territory. The Reconstruction Treaties made that possible. And so a new phase of removal unfolded from 1867 to the early 1880s. Following the Civil War, the Miamis, Citizen Potawatomis, Peorias, Sac and Fox, Modocs, Wynadottes, and Pawnees were among the tribes forced to move to Indian Territory from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Nebraska, and other states. The federal government continued its policy of concentrating dozens of tribes in the same large reservation even as other groups, such as speculators, white squatters, and Freedpeople, voiced ever louder claims to settlement in present-day Oklahoma. All of this led to intense competition for land and much uncertainty. Competing notions about what Oklahoma would become and whose home it would be continued through the final decades of the nineteenth century and well into early statehood.

Boarding Schools and Assimilation

Like earlier treaties, the Reconstruction Treaties included provisions for schooling but these measures led to mixed results. The Cherokees had long established and operated their own schools. The Cherokee Female Seminary at Park Hill was founded in 1851 and run by the Cherokee Nation. After the Civil War, it resumed educating Cherokee women while young men attended the Cherokee Male Seminary near Tahlequah.



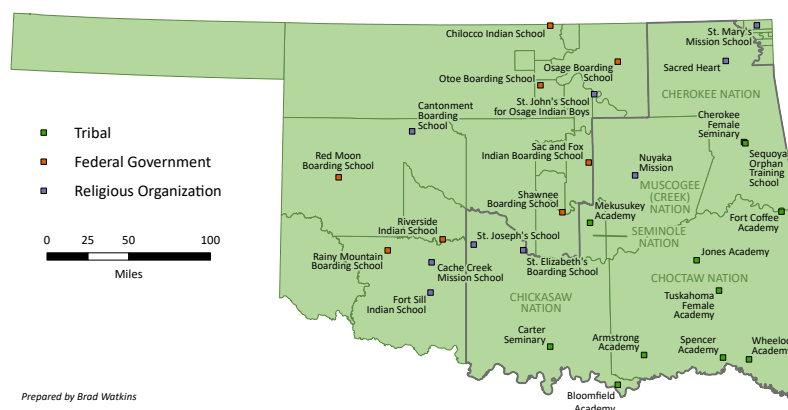
Fig. 4.7: A group of students standing in front of the Cherokee Female Seminary in 1875. The Cherokee Nation operated the Cherokee Female Seminary for young women and operated the Cherokee Male Seminary for young men.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The US government began insisting that Indigenous children attend Indian boarding schools, as they were called. The purpose of Indian boarding schools was to assimilate Native American children, which meant making them more like white American children. The boarding schools were a crucial part of **assimilation** policy. The schools “Americanized” Indigenous children by teaching them to read and speak English and by converting them to Christianity. There were different degrees of assimilation, both inside and outside of Indian boarding schools, but in many instances children were severely punished for speaking their native language or practicing their native religion as a result of the policy.

Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania became a model for many Indian boarding schools. Its founder, Richard Henry Pratt, supported the idea of bringing Indigenous children from all over the country to the school, which meant removing them from their families and tribes. Pratt believed that assimilation would work better if children were far from home and surrounded by children from different tribes so that English would be the only language they had in common. Despite the numerous boarding schools and day schools established within present-day Oklahoma, well over 1,500 Indigenous children were sent from the territory to Pennsylvania to attend Carlisle.

Pratt's approach to educating Indigenous children was harsh. To achieve his mission, he forced the children to give up all aspects of their tribal culture and heritage, including their native language. Pratt became well known for saying "kill the Indian in him, and save the man," which captured his brutal approach toward assimilation through education. This way of thinking led to great mistreatment and abuse. Some Indigenous children sent to Carlisle never made it back home.



Map 4.4: Locations of many Native American schools in Oklahoma. This includes schools run by the federal government, missionaries, and churches, as well as Native nations themselves. In total, there were over seventy Native American schools in Oklahoma, more than in any other state. Beginning in 2021, the Department of the Interior under the leadership of Secretary Deb Haaland and Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland launched the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, the first comprehensive study by the federal government to address the complicated legacy of federal Indian boarding school policies, "with the goal of addressing their intergenerational impact and shedding light on past and present trauma in Indigenous communities." The work is ongoing. For more information and to review the reports, a list of boarding schools, and maps, visit <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>.

Courtesy of Brad Watkins, PhD.

The first boarding school in Indian Territory was the Wichita-Caddo School (later renamed the Riverside Indian School and still in operation today). It was established in 1871 by Quaker missionaries near Anadarko. Joe Wheeler (Wichita) attended Riverside as a young boy, and he later described its abusive practices. "First they cut my hair, then made me eat soap, and then they beat me for speaking my language," he recalled. Wheeler, at least, was sent to a school close to his home, and his father was able to intervene and remove him from the school when he learned about the mistreatment of his son. Others were not so fortunate.

Chillico Indian School opened in 1883 outside of Newkirk in north-central Oklahoma, near the Kansas border. It operated for nearly one hundred years until its closing in 1980. The purpose was very much the same; it sought to assimilate Indigenous children by erasing their heritage and making them adopt the culture of white settlers. The intent to "civilize" children resulted in a range of complicated attitudes and experiences. Many students recalled the pain that they and their family members suffered. For later generations, happy memories of shared experience and a sense of belonging to the school were complicated by memories of feeling isolated and cut off from their culture. Like students at other Native boarding schools throughout the United States, students at Chillico suffered from poor nutrition, illness, and inadequate facilities.



Fig. 4.8: The Chilocco Indian School in 1884. Chilocco was located in north-central Oklahoma, near the town of Newkirk, and operated from 1883 until 1980. Like other government boarding schools, the curriculum included math, English, American culture, and vocational skills.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Some government-sponsored Oklahoma schools offered better experiences to Indigenous children. This was especially true when families were nearby and had some say in what happened at the school. The Rainy Mountain Indian School was built on the Kiowa–Comanche–Apache Reservation in southwestern Oklahoma in 1893. This school offered similar courses to those at Carlisle, but it kept them closer to their families and allowed them to hold onto their culture and traditions. At the same time, one of the major problems this boarding school faced, which became a challenge as well for other Indian boarding schools throughout the United States, was a lack of funding. The federal push to assimilate Indigenous children was never fully funded by the government. Fort Sill Indian School is a good example of this challenge. This school brought children from within and outside of Oklahoma to be educated in vocational courses and English. However, the school suffered from a funding shortage. Over time, more day schools began to emerge because they were less expensive to operate and were often preferred by Indigenous families who wanted their children to live at home. It was not until the 1918 court ruling in ***Dorothy Sunrise v. Cache Consolidated School District No. 1*** that Indigenous children in Oklahoma won the right to attend integrated schools.

Fort Sill Indian School

Quaker missionaries Josiah and Elizabeth Butler established the Fort Sill Indian School, a boarding school, in 1871 in the town of Lawton. During its early years, Native students from western Oklahoma attended the school. Comanche, Apache, Caddo, Kiowa, Delaware, and Wichita families were often forced to send their children there. As a result, students were separated from their families and their tribes. They wore uniforms and had their hair cut short. They were punished for speaking their native languages. During these early years the curriculum emphasized vocational and agricultural training for boys and home economics for girls.

Beginning in the late 1940s, after World War II, Navajo or Diné students from Arizona and New Mexico attended Fort Sill, at one time representing the majority of the student body. By 1970, however, more than 200 of the 300 total students were from Native nations in Oklahoma.

Some students remembered their boarding school experience as positive, as it provided them with the opportunity to meet students from other Native nations and other states. Yet many remembered their boarding school experience as harmful or traumatic. Most felt disconnected from their families and tribal culture. Although alumni, students, and administrators tried to keep the school open, the Bureau of Indian Affairs closed the school in 1980.

Buffalo Soldiers

During the Reconstruction period three groups of African Americans resided in what would become Oklahoma. First, there were Freedpeople who were formerly enslaved members of the Five Tribes. They had the longest history of living in Oklahoma. Second, there were Freedpeople who came to Oklahoma from the South after the Civil War in search of freedom, land, and opportunity. The number of Freedpeople in the area increased once land officially opened to settlement after 1890. African American soldiers in the US Army, often referred to as Buffalo Soldiers, were the third group of Blacks in Oklahoma in the late-nineteenth century. The Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments were all-Black regiments created shortly after the end of the Civil War. The term “Buffalo Soldiers” came from Native Americans who encountered these Black troops. The Cheyenne tribe was the first to use the term “Buffalo Soldiers” to describe Black troops, but it soon became a widely used term. In Oklahoma, the Buffalo Soldiers filled a number of roles. For instance, they helped build the original post at Fort Sill, near Lawton, in the southwestern part of the future state. They were also sent out to enforce evictions of white squatters who tried to illegally claim land in the central part of the state, including at Fort El Reno in present-day El Reno.

The presence of different groups of African Americans in Oklahoma, including Buffalo soldiers, set the stage for the rise of Black towns and communities. This was made possible through land allotments to Freedpeople from the Five Tribes and the opening of Oklahoma to non-Indigenous settlement, especially after 1889. The importance of Black towns and communities is explored in the next chapter.

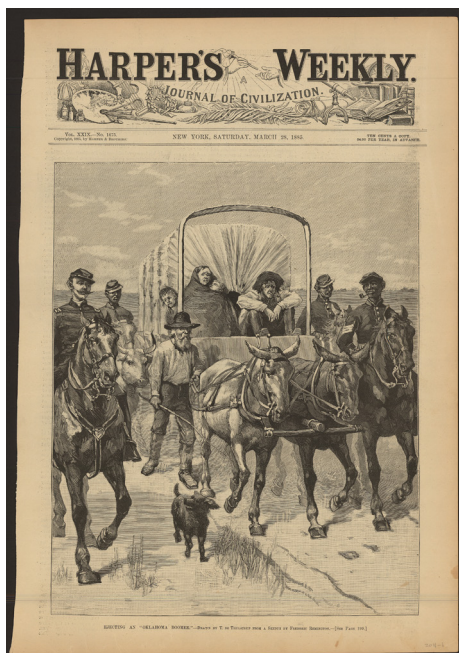


Fig. 4.9: This *Harpers Weekly* illustration depicts Buffalo Soldiers in the late nineteenth century. The term “Buffalo Soldiers” refers to the Black army soldiers who were stationed on the frontier after the American Civil War. That area included Indian and Oklahoma Territories

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

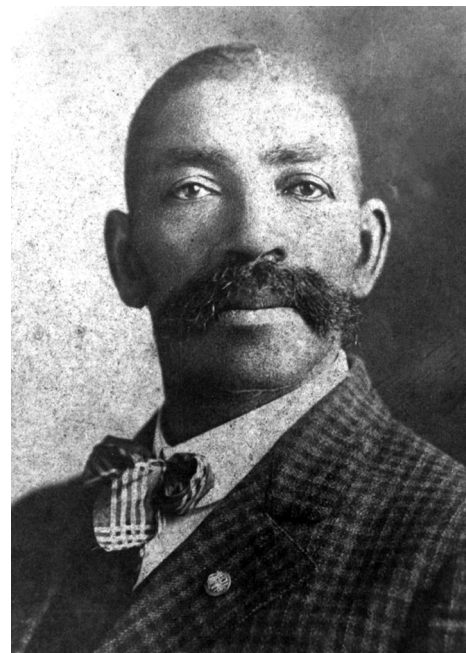


Fig. 4.9: In the late nineteenth century, deputy US Marshal Bass Reeves worked in Indian Territory for thirty-two years, making him one of the longest-working marshals at the time. Formerly enslaved, Reeves was one of the first African Americans to serve as a US marshal. He arrested thousands of criminals during his long and distinguished career.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Setting the Stage for Settlement

The **Homestead Act of 1862** was signed into law during the Civil War, but it would have its greatest impact after the war. While lands in Oklahoma were not officially opened to non-Indigenous settlement until after 1889, the Homestead Act influenced the way that potential settlers thought about land prior to that time. The federal government wanted to increase settlement in western portions of the Louisiana Purchase territory that were still not highly populated. To achieve that purpose, they passed the Homestead Act, which offered free 160-acre tracts of land to anyone who would stay on that land and make improvements to it for at least five years. After that five-year period ended, the individual or family would have permanent ownership of the land. Nearly half a million tracts of land across the western United States were distributed by the government in the last four decades of the nineteenth century as a result of this law. However, numerous families who took advantage of the program found themselves in very difficult situations because of problems with droughts, floods, bug infestations, soil quality, and isolation. It is important to consider that the people most likely to seek out small tracts of free land were poor and did not have the resources to survive some of the economic and environmental challenges they encountered.

The Homestead Act was important in Oklahoma because it led many aspiring land owners to feel as if they had a right to the land that was occupied by Indigenous people. The Doctrine of Discovery continued to shape how newcomers thought about the land. Another important influence was something called **Manifest Destiny**, the idea or belief that it was the destiny (some believed it was even ordained by God) of the United States to expand from one coast to the other and to spread its religious, economic, and political convictions to all inhabitants of this domain, including Indigenous people. If it was the destiny or even the God-given right of the United States to expand, and the government was willing to give away free land to encourage settlement, it made sense to some that the occupied treaty lands in Indian Territory should also be made available to white settlement. This mindset is important to remember when we discuss tensions over settlement in the next few chapters. People who were in Oklahoma illegally and trying to lay claim to property that did not belong to them often saw their actions as justified because of ideas about the Doctrine of Discovery, Manifest Destiny, and the provisions of the 1862 Homestead Act. Regardless of how we might feel about these ideas and beliefs today, it is important to understand how they led to the expansion of settlement in the nineteenth century.

Cattle Trails and Cattle Drives

One important new industry that emerged in the wake of the Civil War was cattle ranching. Multiple trails connected the grazing lands in Texas and Oklahoma to the cattle-ranching industries in Kansas and Missouri. As early as the 1840s, cattle were moved through portions of present-day Oklahoma, but during Reconstruction, the cattle-ranching industry increased substantially. As cattle ranching became a booming industry in the late 1860s and 1870s, the question of who could use these trails became complicated because of differing opinions about land access and ownership. Much of that land still belonged to various tribes, and they did not like having thousands of herds of cattle moved across their land. Among other things, cattle grazing created problems for the buffalo, a traditional food source for Native tribes, by decreasing the availability of grazing land.

Three main trails that went through Oklahoma were the Shawnee Trail, the Chisholm Trail, and the Great Western Trail (also called the Dodge City Trail). The Shawnee Trail closely followed the old Texas Road from Texas into eastern Indian Territory and then on to Baxter Springs in Kansas and Sedalia in Missouri. By 1866 the Chisholm Trail, named after Cherokee scout and trader Jesse Chisholm, had become a popular route to drive cattle north to Abilene and then by rail to northern and eastern markets.

Chickasaw rancher Monfort T. Johnson established his first ranch, Walnut Creek Ranch, in the Chickasaw Nation in today's McClain County and hired Chickasaw Freedman Jack Brown to run it. And by the early 1870s the Great Western Trail became the most popular route to Dodge City, a station on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. During the peak year of 1881, over 300,000 head of cattle traveled the Western Trail from Texas through Indian Territory to Kansas.



Fig. 4.11: Photographed in the mid-1860s, Jesse Chisholm was a Cherokee trader and scout. The famous trail named after him, the Chisholm Trail, was used for many cattle drives. The present-day city of Duncan, Oklahoma, is located along the old trail and is home to the Chisholm Trail Museum.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



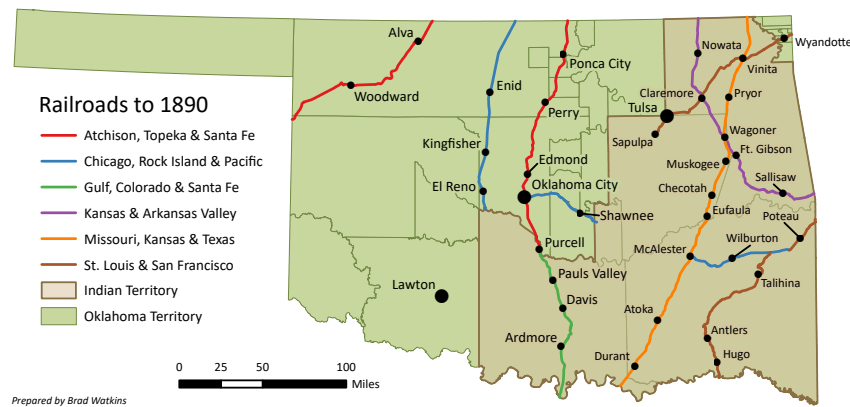
Map 4.5: Cattle trails going through Oklahoma. These often ended at railheads in Kansas where cattle drivers dropped the cows off to get shipped elsewhere. The trails began in Texas or other places where ranchers produced cattle.

Courtesy of Brad Watkins, PhD.

From the mid-1860s until the mid-1880s, more than seven million Texas Longhorn and other cattle breeds traveled north through Indian Territory on their way to railheads in Abilene, Dodge City, Baxter Springs, and Sedalia. The cattle were then loaded onto railroad livestock cars and transported to slaughterhouses in Kansas City and Chicago. Ranchers grazed their herds for modest fees in western and central Indian Territory. Major cattle drives through the territory mostly ended by 1890 due in large part to the expansion of the railroads southward into Texas.

Railroads

Indian Territory became central to the developing national economy with the growth of the railroad and industrialization (the process of creating lots of new technologies and industries). In 1869 the first transcontinental railroad was completed, followed by another three decades of rapid railroad expansion, the construction of factories, and the harvesting of natural resources in the American West, including what would become Oklahoma. A burst of railroad construction occurred in Indian Territory after the Civil War. Before the war, transportation had been limited to horse-drawn wagons and steamboats.



Map 4.6: Railroads in Oklahoma until 1890. Many tribes had to agree to allow railroads to cross through their lands as a part of treaty requirements after the Civil War.

Courtesy of Brad Watkins, PhD.



Fig. 4.12: A mid-twentieth-century photo of the MK&T Railroad depot in Hominy, Oklahoma. Hominy is located in present-day northeastern Oklahoma. The MK&T (commonly known as the “Katy”) was a north-to-south railroad in Indian Territory.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Although many leaders of the Five Tribes had blocked railroad construction in their nations before the Civil War, the Reconstruction Treaties of 1866 required them to permit construction of a north-south and an east-west railroad through Indian Territory. The federal government had planned to provide land grants to the railroad companies, but the Five Tribes successfully resisted that plan.

At first railroad companies sought right-of-way in Indian Territory only to create a route to Texas. Except for wanting to mine coal east of McAlester, they expected to ship few products in or out of Indian Territory. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (MK&T) Railway Company, popularly known as the Katy, was the first railroad company to build across Indian Territory from north to south.

It surveyed a roadbed along the old Texas Road in 1870, and by February 1871, trains were running to Muskogee. The St. Louis–San Francisco Railway (formerly the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad), popularly known as the Frisco, built an east–west line across Indian Territory to Tulsa. The Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe railroad company constructed a northward line from Texas to Purcell, in Indian Territory, the 1870s. The railroad owners focused on business–building opportunities. Competition increased among railroad corporations to control what were sure to be lucrative markets, especially in the agriculture and livestock industries.



Fig. 4.13: Railroad in Guthrie, Indian Territory. This photo was taken in 1889, the year of the first land run.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

By the mid-1880s, Congress approved more north–south railroad construction in the West, including in the region that would become Oklahoma Territory. In 1887, for example, the Southern Kansas Railway (an affiliate of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe) constructed a line from Arkansas City, Kansas, to Purcell. The rails crossed the Cherokee Outlet and Ponca and Otoe–Missouria lands before entering the Unassigned Lands (land not assigned to any tribe in the late nineteenth century). The Cherokees protested, but the federal government ruled that it held the power of eminent domain (which gave the government the right to take the land for public use) in the Cherokee Outlet. During the railroad construction boom in Indian Territory during the 1870s and 1880s, restless land speculators would plat and sell land near the station sites, and new towns grew up quickly. Railroads crisscrossed Indian Territory and the hunger for land was pervasive.

Industrialization and Railroad Expansion

After the Civil War, the United States made a big leap forward in its development of economic, manufacturing, and transportation systems. New technologies helped make all this possible. The most significant change was the transfer of production by individuals to production by machines. This allowed the start of mass production of goods. New machines began replacing skilled craftspeople. Industrialization changed the way people worked and expanded the American economy.

Following the Civil War, railroad construction boomed. Before 1871, there were 45,000 miles of track in the United States. By 1900, that number increased to 170,000 miles. Transcontinental railroads connected the East Coast to the West Coast. In Oklahoma, Native–held lands presented a barrier to national transportation ambitions. Railroad companies wanted to build rail lines through those territories. At the same time, railroad lines eased travel and made settlement accessible to more people. Railroads connected the nation and boosted local rural economies. The federal government promoted railroad development and worked with industrialists to carry out its vision.

Reconstruction Oklahoma

UNIT 1

Conclusion

Many of the changes in Oklahoma that took place during Reconstruction can be traced directly to provisions in the Reconstruction Treaties and shifting federal Indian policy. The loss of tribal land and diminished tribal sovereignty made new settlement possible, but it also led to increased crime and lawlessness. Forts were established by the army to serve as strategic outposts and to protect settlers. But they could not keep up with the increasing conflicts as the population grew. The push to assimilate Indigenous people led to the growth of both boarding schools and day schools. Settlers of various racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, including missionaries like the Quakers, found opportunities in Oklahoma.

During Reconstruction, there were many competing ideas and policies in Oklahoma concerning the direction of settlement and statehood. The land could remain a large reservation for Indigenous people or could become a beacon of hope for African Americans looking for a refuge from racism in a place where they could create their own communities. It could also be a new state for poor whites from the war-torn South and for a growing number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, who flocked to the United States looking for new opportunities and land.

By 1890, the larger area once called Indian Territory was split into the twin territories of Indian Territory (the eastern half of present-day Oklahoma) and Oklahoma Territory (the western half of present-day Oklahoma). From 1890 until statehood in 1907, the twin territories experienced intense migration and a rapid rise in land claims. Tribal sovereignty came under increased attack in the decades following Reconstruction. Yet tribes persisted in their efforts to control their own schools, governments, and resources. Black people looked to that same shared space with optimism for the kind of future they might be able to create in Oklahoma. That effort is explored in the next chapter.

Short Answer Questions

- 1 How did the Reconstruction Treaties impact Freedpeople who lived in Indian Territory?
- 2 What events led to the Washita Massacre?
- 3 Explain two ways that the Reservation System was ineffective.
- 4 Identify two tribes that were removed to Indian Territory after the Civil War.
- 5 Describe life in Indian boarding schools for Native children.
- 6 Describe the relationship between railroads, cattle trails, and the cattle industry.

Short Response Questions

- 1 What factors led to increasing tensions in Indian Territory during the Reconstruction era? Provide specific examples in your response.
- 2 In what ways did the reservation system impact the ability of tribes to self-govern and maintain cultural traditions? Provide specific examples in your response.