

# *Assimilate or Perish!*

*The assimilation of the Cherokee tribe in the nineteenth century*



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## Introduction

*This is the way the world ends*

*This is the way the world ends*

*This is the way the world ends*

*Not with a bang but a whimper.*

-T.S. Elliot-

*The Hollow Men*

In a colonial situation, the colonizing power presumes, due to traditions such as social Darwinism, that its culture is superior to that of the indigenous people. Therefore, the colonial power assumes the right and the obligation— based on concepts such as Rudyard Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden* – to explain this superiority to the indigenous people, as a form of a father-son relationship whereby the colonial power has to do its duty by civilizing its “children.”

Until relatively recently few historians covered the history of American Indians. Historians implied that America had no history before the Europeans set foot on the North-American soil. And even after 1492, the Indians had nothing to do with the creation of American society and American culture in general. The European conquerors were looking to spread Western technology, Christianity and democratic institutions, especially to the “savage” people discovered by Columbus. The Indians were seen as one identical group. But despite the misleading name, the Indian tribes were never identical, seldom allied and, moreover, were rarely unanimous in their resistance against the white oppressor. The North-American Indian tribes differed in languages, size, history and culture. Moreover, they all had different needs, cultures, dialects, social problems and political traditions. Most Indian tribes (if we may use that word) distrusted other Indian groups and were rarely in contact with each other. Before the 1960s and 70s, American people knew little of the dark side of the European discovery of America. Many Americans assumed, from their history textbooks, that any warfare and the bloodshed caused by this warfare were the result of the resistance of the

savages against the noble and civilized explorers, who were just helping the Indians to release them from their false religion and cultural backwardness.

Traditional historians did not differ much from their politicians and the settlers who helped create the United States. In the nineteenth century, the American government tried to find a solution to what it referred to as the “Indian problem.” From the first moment of settling, Americans had to live with the Indian tribes, and to do this peacefully, they had to understand them. But, proud of their civilized heritage, most of these white settlers were certain that what they found in the New World was just the opposite of that: not only had they found an uncivilized environment, but also uncivilized men. The Indian languages were entirely different; Indian culture looked like the lowest form of paganism.

In the simplest terms, the American Indian culture may be described as an effort by free human beings to develop their capabilities, but only in ways that do not harm nature (with nature understood in its broadest sense). Damage to nature is considered as an ‘imbalance’ and is strictly forbidden. Engineering, for example, is something that can be approved only when it does not leave any scars on the earth. This also accounts for agriculture. Many tribes were agricultural, but only within parameters that did not damage the natural vegetation.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the culture of the white settlers, labor involved for most tribes a totally different way of living. Most tribes lived by hunting. Not only labor was a major difference between the two cultures, the matter of ownership was also very important. The Indians must have thought the Europeans were insane: how can someone actually own land? The land was created by the *Great Spirit*. People and animals use it; it is not something that is bound to an individual. To own land made no more sense than to own the air or the clouds or water. Hence, the differences between the two cultures were immense.

1763 was the year that the English settlers established a boundary that separated the Indians’ country from that of the white settlers. This boundary was a line that continuously moved westward to make room for new English communities. The number of Indians rapidly decreased. The causes of this decrease were diseases, wars and starvation. The Indians were crushed by white settlers in the east as well as in the west where settlers were looking for more land. The Indian tribes in the central states had to deal with white adventurers who lacked and ignored legal notions and behaved aggressively. In the white search for more gold and land, the boundaries of Indian land were disregarded, and all treaties violated. This led to atrocities and wars between Indians and whites, during which most tribes were heavily

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<sup>1</sup> R. Robinson, *Exploring Native American wisdom* (Franklin Lakes: New Page Books, 2003), 11.

overwhelmed. Furthermore, the transcontinental railroad project meant indirectly the death of thousands of Plain Indians. During the building of this railroad, the workers saw the great and impressive herds of buffalo. Those herds would soon be killed by hunters and sportsmen. The tribes who were very dependent on the buffalo for food and clothing soon died of starvation, or had no other choice than to sign the white man's treaties.

The Americans were fully aware that the Indians had to assimilate within white society in order to survive. White civilians had an important task in this process of assimilation. Teachers, blacksmiths, farmers and carpenters were forced to educate the natives in their occupation.<sup>2</sup> Americans thought that to be civilized a man should work for a living in agriculture or engineering and should be a Christian. These European thoughts would eventually lead to a form of what Raphaël Lemkin calls *Cultural Genocide*, a coordinated plan to destroy all aspects that are of major importance for certain ethnic groups and establish their group identity (such as culture, religion, and language).<sup>3</sup> Lemkin classifies genocide in three groups: Physical genocide, Biological genocide, Cultural genocide.<sup>4</sup> Native Americans faced all three types of genocide during a period of five hundred years. In what can be considered as a process of Physical genocide, the Native tribes were butchered by the US army, faced a government policy of starvation implemented by destroying the orchards and buffalo herds, and the spreading of diseases like smallpox. Since 1763, when Lord Jeffrey Amherst ordered to send smallpox-infected blankets to the Ottawas to exterminate the Indians, the spread of diseases had been an indirect part of the Anglo-American policies to destroy the Indians of North America.<sup>5</sup> The Indians also had to deal with Biological genocide, whereby the US government sterilized Native women.<sup>6</sup> And of course Cultural genocide was an important tool in US Indian policies within the assimilation program.

In this thesis I will focus on this Cultural genocide by looking at assimilation programs aiming to turn Native Americans into "regular" Americans. (I will show, though, that Cultural genocide involves Physical and Biological genocide as a lesser sort of crime.) The US government passed laws condemning the traditions and beliefs of Indians, denying their religious freedom, and forced the removal of Indian tribes from their lands, all in an effort to

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<sup>2</sup> W. Churchill, *Struggle for the land* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), 19.

<sup>3</sup> R. Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of occupation analysis of government proposals for redress* (Clark: The Lawbook Exchange, 1944), 79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> W. Churchill, *Kill the Indian, save the man* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004), 34.

<sup>6</sup> R. Means, *Where white men fear to tread* (Los Angeles: General Publishing Group, 1995), 375.

compel assimilation and abolish Native cultures and languages.<sup>7</sup> Such actions by the federal government left the Indians in a state of poverty. Unlike other scholars, I argue that in many ways the extermination of the Jews during Hitler's reign in Nazi Germany parallels what occurred in America in the Native American assimilation efforts.

More specifically, I will focus on the assimilation process of the Cherokees. While many tribes opposed the attempts to turn them into "regular" Americans, a few tribes assimilated into white society. Many of the Cherokees, for instance, adopted white culture. The question that I aim to address here is why so many Cherokees were eager to adopt the white lifestyle. The Cherokees are interesting because they were seen as the showpiece of Indian acculturation. I will analyse the history of the Cherokees' interaction with white society and explore the assimilation program that was imposed on them. Unfortunately, most of the sources about the Cherokees are secondary sources and not primary sources, because those records do not exist or are astonishingly meagre. The Cherokees had oral traditions; they were only able to read since the beginning of the nineteenth century when the Cherokee alphabet was invented. The few primary sources that do exist are written in Cherokee dialects no scholar has been able to translate, or were destroyed during the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> Even some Cherokee names that I mention in this thesis cannot be translated with certainty. Fortunately, James Mooney, an American ethnographer who had lived among the Cherokees for several years, was able to collect most of the Cherokees myths and traditions, and is an important source that I use. Furthermore, I use a book of J.T Garrett, a member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokees, for the description of Cherokee traditions. Most of the primary sources used here are "white" in nature: government documents and policy statements and descriptions of Cherokee culture and society offered by white missionaries.

As I hope to show, this research will establish that the US government was not aware of the cultural differences between the Indian tribes. As a result, the effort to develop one assimilation program for all Indians was doomed to fail. The government succeeded in assimilating the Cherokees because of special circumstances. The Cherokees were exceptional in that they had the most mixed-blood members in their tribe, were agriculturists by origin, and did anything to prevent disharmony in their tribe. Also, several of their religious convictions meshed with Christian ideas. Yet, while those factors would make them more

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<sup>7</sup> Indian Removal Act of 1830, ch. 148, 4 Stat. 411 (1830); Act of Feb. 8, 1887, ch.119, 24 Stat. 388 (1887) (General Allotment Act) (repealed 2000). <http://www.lawfareblog.com/wiki/the-lawfare-wiki-document-library/materials-from-the-early-republic/the-early-republic-legislative-materials-2/act-of-may-28-1830-4-stat-411/>

<sup>8</sup> *Anthropological Papers*, Numbers 75-80, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 196 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 183.

willing than other tribes to assimilate, the Cherokees were hardly representative of Native American tribal cultures.



# Part I

## The background of Indian assimilation

*Now, you tell us to work for a living, but the Great Spirit did not make us to work, but to live by hunting. You white men can work if you want to. We do not interfere with you, and again you say, why do you not become civilized? We don't want your civilization!*

-Crazy Horse-

Before I describe how the Cherokee tribe dealt with assimilation policies, it is first important to understand the European viewpoint of American Indians. Such a viewpoint is of major importance to understand why whites insisted upon Indian assimilation, and how the assimilation policies were formed.

### European thoughts

One of the first publications delineating European ideas about American Indians is Richard Johnson's *Nova Britannia*: a description of the savages who inhabited the state of Virginia. "Virginia is inhabited with wild and savage people, that live in troupes like herds of deer in a forest: they have no law but nature, they have no arts nor science, yet they are generally very loving and gentle, and do entertain and relive our people with great kindness. They are easy to be brought to good, and would embrace a better condition."<sup>9</sup> Seventeenth-century settler Alexander Whitaker wrote that the Indians worshipped the Devil and nineteenth-century ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan condemned, in his *League of the Iriquois*, the Native savagery in relation to the European/American civilization.<sup>10</sup> Puritan minister John Elliot perfectly explained English thought about Indians: in one of his speeches to the Massachusetts, Eliot made clear that the English were superior because they were Christians and the Indians were not. Also, the English worked in buildings, and were clothed,

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<sup>9</sup>Richard Johnson quoted in: R.Aquila, *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>10</sup>R. Pearce, *The savages of America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1953), 12.

whereas the Indians were not.<sup>11</sup> However, historian Roy Harvey Pearce explains in his book *The Savages of America* that these thoughts changed during the centuries.<sup>12</sup> From 1609 up through the 1770s, Pearce states, the Indians were considered as men who could receive the salvation of God; therefore, the Indian had to be transformed into a civilized man who adopted Christianity.<sup>13</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, Pearce notes, an ideological shift occurred. The problem then became one of understanding the Indian: not as one to be civilized and to be lived among, but rather as one whose nature and way of life were an obstacle to civilized progress. Pearce's third variant is not very specific, but what I have taken as a third version of American thought about Indians took place in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Here, the Indian is seen as a non-entity of human society, a representative of non-civilization. As a result, the Indians had a choice: they could assimilate or vanish.

This European way of thinking would nowadays be classified as racist thought, but if we place this thought in its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century context, it is quite understandable. Europeans knew little about the people they had discovered, which is obviously not a surprise. Europeans were first introduced to the Cherokee tribe in the Old World when small delegations of Cherokees were brought to London in 1730 and 1762. In 1762, when the delegation was about to meet the king of England, a biblical scholar published the first known effort to explain their place in scriptural anthropology. This anonymous scholar stated in his enquiry *An Enquiry into the Origin of the Cherokees* that they were descendants of Japhet, hence of the white race. Thus, the scholar not only claimed that the Cherokees were included in the biblical prophecies, but also suggested that as descendants of Meshek, the son of Japhet, the Cherokees and other Indian tribes might one day fulfil the prophecy described in the Book of Ezekiel and ravage the Europeans.<sup>14</sup> Clearly showing us British thoughts on the Indians, the source is probably the reason why the English were quite harsh towards Indians and, in particular, the Cherokees. The source proves another thing: it shows us that Christianity had an important role in the depiction of the Indians and that the European viewpoints are mostly based upon Christian sources.

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<sup>11</sup> J. Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 149.

<sup>12</sup> Pearce, *The savages of America*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> W. DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, (1899), [http://www.archive.org/stream/samsonoccom00loverich/samsonoccom00loverich\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/samsonoccom00loverich/samsonoccom00loverich_djvu.txt)

## The Christian aim

The whole basis of the assimilation program can be found in Christianity. In this paragraph, I will describe how the Protestants and Catholics tried to deal with “the Indian Problem,” and in which way these religions contributed to a form of assimilation. To understand the Christian viewpoint on American Indians, we have to examine a papal document issued forty years before Columbus's historic discovery in 1492. In the year 1452 Pope Nicholas V created the bull *Romanus Pontifex* in which the Pope declared war against all non-Christians throughout the world, specifically sanctioning the Christian nations to colonize and exploit the territories of the infidels.<sup>15</sup> All non-Christians were considered enemies of the Catholic faith and were seen as the scum of human society. Accordingly, in the bull *Romanus Pontifex*, the Pope directed the Portuguese king to "capture, vanquish, and subdue the Saracens, pagans, and other enemies of Christ," to "put them into perpetual slavery," and "to take all their possessions and property."<sup>16</sup> Pope Alexander V followed the politics of his predecessor Pope Nicholas V, and issued the bull *Inter Cetera* in which he stated that the "discovered people be subjugated and brought to the faith itself."<sup>17</sup> According to Alexander, this would propagate and expand the Christian empire.<sup>18</sup> Then, to avoid any atrocities between Spain and Portugal, the Pope drew a line by splitting the globe in half, giving Spain the right to conquest one side of the globe, and Portugal the other. This bull is known as *The Treaty of Tordesillas*.<sup>19</sup>

The aforementioned papal documents were frequently used to justify the actions and policies of European nations towards indigenous people. According to Christian law, all Christian nations had the right to claim any newly discovered non-Christian areas and to have absolute rule over the people they discovered. Over the next several centuries, these beliefs gave rise to the Doctrine of Discovery used by Spain, Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands, all Christian nations, to defend their system of colonization.<sup>20</sup> The Doctrine of Discovery became important in U.S Law when it was adopted by the Supreme Court in 1823, in order to claim possession of Indian Lands.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> S. Newcomb, "Five Hundred Years of Injustice," in: *Shaman's Drum*, Fall 1992, 18-20.

<sup>16</sup> F. Davenport, *European Treaties bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies to 1648*, Vol. 1 ( Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington), 24.

[http://www.archive.org/stream/eurotreatiesus00daverich/eurotreatiesus00daverich\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/eurotreatiesus00daverich/eurotreatiesus00daverich_djvu.txt)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> J. Thacher, *Christopher Columbus* (New York City: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1903), 127.

<sup>19</sup> Portugal claimed that Spain tried to establish its dominion over lands that already were in the possession of other Christian nations.

<sup>20</sup> Newcomb, "Five Hundred Years of Injustice," 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*. 19.

These papal bulls and measures came from the Catholic Church, and were, obviously, used to spread the Catholic faith. However, the English settlers in North America worshipped the Anglican Church. The *Letters Patent*, however, a document written by the King of England in 1606, shows us that there were not many differences during that period between the Anglican and Catholic approach. The King of England wrote: “Which made by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to glory of His Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian religion to such people and may in time bring the infidels and savages living in those parts, to human civility and to a settled and quiet government.”<sup>22</sup> Both religions decided that the indigenous people had to be converted to western civilization and Christianity. This idea returns in a letter of Stephen Riggs, a Sioux missionary, who wrote: “As tribes and nations, the Indians must perish and live only as men! With this impression of the tendency of God’s purposes as they are being developed year after year, I would labor to prepare them to fall in with Christian civilization that is destined to cover the earth.”<sup>23</sup>

It never became an official English policy, however. The Protestants and Catholics sent out their missionaries, convinced that the Indians were just waiting to be converted. Yet none of these religions realised conversions on a large scale.<sup>24</sup> Why did the missionary attempts fail? And what were the differences and similarities between the Protestant and Catholic conversion efforts?

### **In the beginning there was the word....**

What really transformed Indian life were diseases. When colonists moved westward, they brought diseases with them. These diseases destroyed native social life. With such a high number of deaths among tribes, gaps in their social structures occurred. The pandemic in 1801 almost destroyed the Omaha, the Ponca, the Ottawa, and the Iowa, and killed a large percentage of the Arikara and the Sioux. The 1836-40 smallpox pandemic may have been the most horrible episode of disease in Indian history, killing 10,000 Indians in a few weeks.<sup>25</sup> But if we define the diseases as the instruments that destroyed the lives of Indians, then the Christian missionaries were definitely the performers of it, or as James Axtell calls them, “dangerous blackrobes disguised as members of a Peace Corps, and although they came bearing a message from a ‘Prince of Peace,’ they unconsciously bore a whole civilization that

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<sup>22</sup> R. Pearce, *Savagism and civilization* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1988), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Riggs quoted in: A. Uchida, ‘The Protestant Mission and Native American Response: The Case of the Dakota Mission, 1835-1862,’ in: *The Japanese Journal of American Studies*, No. 10, (1999), 153.

<sup>24</sup> C. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 313.

<sup>25</sup> R. Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 91-92.

would not tolerate the America they had found.”<sup>26</sup>

Indian Christianization and tribal response to it depended upon the entire contact situation and the overall stage of acculturation in a given tribe. A detailed discussion of Native American reactions to missionaries for more than five hundred years, and among more than three hundred tribes, is a study in itself. Therefore, I will only summarize this whole process. Because there were more than three hundred tribes, each with its own culture and religion, it is impossible to generalize how the Indians reacted to Christianity. One of the difficulties underlying this thesis is that Native responses to assimilation were as varied as the number of Indian tribes; to make matters worse, they usually differed within the same tribe. A few tribes murdered the missionaries, while other tribes embraced them. Why some Indian tribes were willing to submit themselves to white Europeans depended most of the time on their religious and moral ways of living. A number of Indians was curious about, and tolerant of, the missionary conversion efforts. The most violent reactions against missionaries can be found in the western states where the Spanish invaders used their military power to impose the Catholic faith overnight. In the states which are now called Arizona and New Mexico, the Navaho Indians heavily rebelled and after bloody battles drove the Spanish missionaries out. Catholic missionaries ordered the soldiers to torture the Indians who refused to convert to the Catholic faith.<sup>27</sup>

The discovery of the Native people in America created few biblical difficulties. How did these Indians fit into biblical history? From which of the three sons of Noah did they descend? They were not black-skinned so they could not be descendants of Ham, but it could be that they were descendants of Shem and Japhet. In the early nineteenth century, European ethnographers believed in the idea of separate creations for each race of mankind. God created not only a white Adam and Eve but also a yellow, brown, black and red Adam and Eve (which is not mentioned in the Book of Genesis).<sup>28</sup>

When the Europeans first met the Indians, they were astonished to find out that the Indians saw themselves as far superior to the white people. The Indians could not believe there was a better life than they already had. Their religions suited their environment and their way of life. Their religious ceremonies gave them control over natural forces, which means they believed they were God’s favorite people because He gave them divine powers in order to control threats that could disrupt their lives. They knew that the Great Spirit was there to

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<sup>26</sup> J. Axtell, *Beyond 1492* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155.

<sup>27</sup> H. Bowden, *American Indians and Christian missions* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1981), 54-55.

<sup>28</sup> L.E. Huddleston, *Origins of the American Indians: European Concepts 1492-1729* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967).

help them; He created the earth to provide them with food and vegetables. The animals were created to sacrifice themselves for their meat and the flowers and herbs to provide cures for diseases and wounds. If they thanked the Great Spirit by performing dances and ceremonies, then the world would remain orderly and its people would be in harmony with nature and the supernatural spirits of the universe. From birth, Indian children learned these sacred myths, histories, and dances and participated in the tribal ceremonies that kept the evil spirits in the underworld. Harmony was the highest ideal, for it was necessary in all elements of life. In Indian religions every tribe member was responsible for participating in a way that benefited the whole tribe.<sup>29</sup>

Thus not only white Europeans thought of themselves as superior human beings. The Indians had similar feelings of superiority, a simple outcome of the limitations of their human experience. They were merely bound to their social group, tribe or nation. Therefore, a few tribes (for example, Iroquois, Navaho) gave themselves names such as "the originals" or "the true men," while their enemies were given names such as "Eskimo" or "Sioux," which meant "rattlesnakes."<sup>30</sup> All Indian tribes in North America shared a belief that all living things on earth possessed souls and spirits and because they had spirits had to be treated with respect and should be honoured in ceremonies.<sup>31</sup> When the first Europeans arrived, the Indians saw them as different, but human. Therefore, the Indians were prepared to treat them with respect and did not see them as inferior. The Indians incorporated the new people in their existing history, which does not necessarily mean that they saw the white people as gods. However, Indians believed that all the spirits had the power not only to cure, but also to kill. This is the reason why some Indians looked up to the white man. The Indians were astounded that the diseases Europeans brought killed the Indians but not the white people. Perhaps out of fear or out of admiration (or both), most of the Native tribes were quite tolerant in relation to white newcomers.

On the other hand, Christianity was not that tolerant. Christianity had no room for false gods and strange rituals. It aimed to destroy the pagan and infidel worlds and change them, as Catholics had done during the crusades in the Holy Land. Christianity is, and always has been, an evangelical religion, which wants to spread Christ's word all over the world. According to the New Testament, Christ said to his disciples that they had to spread the word of God in the entire world, not only in the Middle East. All people of other religions had to be

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<sup>29</sup> W. McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

converted.

However, a few tribes allowed the missionaries onto their lands, because they thought that the missionaries could provide them with certain advantages such as food and that the missionaries were magicians who could benefit the tribe.<sup>32</sup> When aggressive tribes such as the Pawnee learned that the missionaries only came to transform Indian culture, they persecuted the missionaries and destroyed all the missionaries' cattle, clothes and mills.<sup>33</sup>

As I have explained before, all European religious institutions, Protestant and Catholic, were convinced that it was necessary to convert the Indians to Christianity before they could be civilized men. The Protestants started with conversions immediately after arrival. These English settlers were supremely confident that their way of life was superior to any other European culture. Missionaries thought they only had to guide the Indians towards civilization and the Indians in turn would just follow them. The missionaries believed that once an Indian learned about Christianity, he or she would recognize this religion as the Truth and acknowledge the superiority of the white men's culture.<sup>34</sup> Even before there were plans to civilize the Indians, the English missionaries chose a phrase which tells us a lot about their religious attitudes. From the moment they arrived in the New World until the American Revolution, it was said, in an interesting phrase, that the first goal of the English was to "reduce" the Indians from savagery to "civility".<sup>35</sup> Like all other white people, the English saw themselves as superior human beings, who would "raise" the savages to their own level rather than "reduce" them. But from their perspective, Indians were backwards in manners, religion and industry. They were actually a kind of non-human, the total opposite of what they should be. Thus, the missionaries looked for remedies to "cure" the Indians of their savage behavior: their savage roots were not seen as a good basis to plant the seeds of Christianity in. Because they were so confused and ungoverned, they were not worthy the holy ordinances and baptism.<sup>36</sup> The Indians first had to be turned into Men. Indians had not learned what the Protestants called the "Arts of civil Life & Humanity," which actually means the classic arts, such as philosophy and theology.<sup>37</sup> Also, before approaching theology, a man should first master the arts of human living. The English purportedly acquired these arts due to their education; Indians had never had any education and therefore lacked these arts completely. Moreover, most Indians who adopted the white man's lifestyle did this temporarily. They

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<sup>32</sup> R. Berkhofer, *Salvation and the savage* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 109.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 110.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 148.

<sup>36</sup> J. Axtell, *Cultural origins of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 133.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 135.

were not motivated to do the hard daily labor demanded by the missionaries, lacking the European work ethic. The necessity of this work ethic was completely misunderstood by the Indians, even the converted ones. And it was this idleness that outraged the Protestants. Idleness was, in the eyes of the Protestants, the greatest sin on earth. According to Protestants, it was only hard honest labor that could satisfy God. Although the Indians saw that the tools the Europeans used were more developed and made work easier, they still preferred their own methods. Hence to the colonists, who taught that a work ethic was sacred, there was nothing more irritating than to see that these “savages” turned their back to European tools and did not work according to European rules.<sup>38</sup> Puritan John Winthrop thought that the natives’ claims on their own territory were illegal because they “Inclose no Land, neither have [they] any settled habitation, nor any tame cattle to improve the Land by.”<sup>39</sup>

What made conversion attempts so difficult was that it was very hard for protestant missionaries to find Indian towns. Especially in the east, many tribes lived in tipis and were nomadic. This meant that one day the field was filled with hundreds of tipis and the next day they were all gone. These tribes were not just unpredictable, but perhaps worse: they were uncontrollable.

However, the most important obstacle for the missionaries who wanted to teach Indians to believe something they had never heard of before involved a certain type of doubt. Did Indians fully understand what Christianity really meant? Did they understand the Ten Commandments? Did they understand what these priests were talking about? The Bible and Christianity were obviously totally unknown to the Indians. Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (a man no Indian had ever heard of) who lived in the Middle East (a part of the world no Indian knew it existed) and who lived more than sixteen hundred years ago. Furthermore, Christians believe in the story of creation whereby God created the universe out of nothing, made the first man and woman on earth, and gave them the Garden of Eden. Most of the Indian tribes believed that the earth was covered with water and a “Skywoman” fell down from heaven and created a gigantic island on the back of a turtle.<sup>40</sup> The story of Christ’s crucifixion is also an example of how confusing Christianity actually was for Indians. After hearing about Christ’s suffering, a Delaware Indian replied: “Yes, I know who killed Him. The white people were the ones who did it, and the Indians are not to

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<sup>38</sup> More of the European work ethic, and how Indians lacked this ethic, can be found in *New Englands Prospect*, page 87, <http://archive.org/stream/woodsnewengland00woodgoog#page/n135/mode/2up>.

<sup>39</sup> Winthrop quoted in: J. Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 150.

<sup>40</sup> W. Fenton, “This Island, The world on the Turtle’s back,” in: *Journal of American Folklore*, 75, 1962, 283-300. <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/538365?uid=3738736&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21102768002513>



blame.”<sup>41</sup> The more the Indians heard of the doctrines of Calvinism, the more confused they were and the less interested they became. For example, when the Indians heard about the crucifixion of Christ, the Indians asked: “Why did you kill your God?” Or as a Cherokee woman asked: “Why did God let Satan tempt Eve?”<sup>42</sup> What the Indians believed is what historian William McLoughlin called cultural pluralism. It is the idea, and an idea that is considered as heresy by the Christian faith, that God created more human beings than just Adam and Eve. Many tribes believed that the Great Spirit had made three different kinds of men: one red, one black and one white. The red man was placed on the American continent; the white man was placed in Europe and the black man in Africa.<sup>43</sup> The trouble started when the white man left the place that God had intended for him.

Another major difficulty, not only for Protestant missionaries but also Catholics, was making Christianity bearable. On the one hand, this was not an impossible task. Native religion has certain similarities with Christianity. Like the followers of Christianity, the Indians believed in an all-knowing and powerful spirit, known as The Great Spirit, who was the source of all that was good, but could not be seen. Just as in Christianity, they also believed in an evil spirit. But instead of praising the benefactions of the Great Spirit, just as Christians do, Indians focussed on attempts to deflect the reaction of the evil spirit. According to the biblical explanation, Indians and all other peoples descend from Adam and Eve. On the other hand religions that do not use the Bible, explain the creation of men differently. Indians accepted the biblical explanation, but with a twist. They generally emphasized the natural and supernatural worlds, divided in nature and spirit. Indians brought the spiritual world to the real world, through the performance of rituals. Just as in Christianity (praying), these rituals could be performed individually, but many were only effective in a commune performed by a shaman. In contrast to Christian priests, the shaman really possessed supernatural powers: the shaman was as much feared as he was worshipped. The Indian shaman was also the missionaries’ enemy, because he held the Indians in his power through fear. For that reason, the shaman was a roadblock in the white conversion efforts. One of the other problems in these efforts was the Indians’ ideas about death. While Indians believed in an afterlife, the missionaries’ message about heaven and hell was totally unfamiliar to them. Especially the word “sin” they did not understand. Many Indians asked why God punished sinners in hell for eternity even when they repented their sins, because they were taught that God forgives. They

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<sup>41</sup> L. Gipson, *The Moravian Indian Mission on the White River* (Indianapolis : Indiana Historical Bureau, 1938), 363.

<sup>42</sup> McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, 13.

asked questions such as "why does God make men sick?" and "why did God did not kill the devil?" Of course, the missionaries had answers to these questions, but whether these answers appeased the Indians' doubts is unsure. Also, many Indians were not keen to believe the Gospel, because if hell was covered with fire, an incredible supply of wood was needed: the missionaries said that there was no wood in the underworld and argued that hell burned from itself.

The many complications in the Christian efforts to convert the Indians frustrated the English. They demanded nothing more than total assimilation. An Indian had to give up everything he knew and all that he was in order to become a Christian. Frustrated in their efforts, in a shift the English focused on the Indian youth because they were the future and were not so deeply rooted in their native culture. To introduce the Indian youth to civilization whites sent them to boarding schools where they were disciplined, sexually segregated, and far away from their families and the traditional habits of the tribe. As historian Axtell shows, within a time-span of ten years, four boarding schools were established.<sup>44</sup> The focus on the Indian youth also had to do with hunting. Hunting can be seen as a form of ritualized warfare, because the hunting took place under strict religious sanctions. Hunting was such an important thing that young Indians, as soon as they were able to walk, learned to use bows and arrows. Because hunting was a tough and dangerous "occupation," Indian children were hardened by their parents by being put into ice-cold water and in holes in the ground in the winter.<sup>45</sup> The English were fully aware that young boys who were taught to linger in the woods to catch game could also ambush unsuspecting Englishmen. The missionaries hoped that they could take the Indian children under their custody before they had been confronted with this tribal culture. So by teaching these Indian children, the missionaries hoped, as Gideon Blackburn says in his letter to J. Morse, "not only [to] rescue the rising race from savage manners, but also to light up beacons, by which the parents might gradually be conducted into the same field of improvement."<sup>46</sup> Until the 18th century, they built boarding schools on their territory far from the tribes, parents and family. The protestant missionaries followed the line of the Catholic Jesuits and agreed with them that "the consciousness of being three hundred leagues distant from their own country makes these young men more tractable."<sup>47</sup> In these schools, they were quarantined from all contact with the outside world, and, more importantly, without female contact. Boys were considered the best candidates to

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<sup>44</sup> Axtell, *Cultural origins of North America*, 188.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 158.

<sup>46</sup> Blackburn quoted in: Berkhofer, *Salvation and the savage*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 161.

be converted because it was assumed that, upon return to their tribe, they eventually would become its leaders and civilize their brethren. At the boarding schools, the white settlers' biggest concern was the Indians' state of clothing, or the lack of it. In Indian communities, children ran around naked until puberty, and women walked around naked from head to the belly. These tempting images were potential threats. It was thought that, when Indians dressed like Englishmen, they would eventually think like Englishmen. Therefore, the missionaries' task was to get the half-naked Indians to look like Englishmen. Although this seemed to be one of the easiest tasks, the English hardly succeeded in the end.<sup>48</sup> Another method was to cut off the Indian's hair. Hair was one of the most important parts of an Indian's identity. Long hair signalled the Indian's pride, independence, and vanity. And it was especially "pride" that angered the English, because pride was for them one of the greatest sins: it was pride that led Adam and Eve to ruin the Garden of Eden. For that reason, according to the English, long hair was an insult to God. The Indians had to be "reduced" in their pride and liberty until they were just like the English.

The missionaries realized that the Indians' parents played an important role in the children's attendance. Therefore, the parents had to be taught the importance of schooling. It was quite clear to the missionaries that the English language played an important part in the effort to civilize the Indians. Hence, the Indian students had to be taught in the English language. Because the process of civilizing and conversion became increasingly an educational task, the colonists turned to the educational institutions for support. The construction of towns for the Indians was part of the effort, because for Europeans a town was the symbol of civility. The town would bring order to Indian life. Moreover, it would destroy the Indians' nomadic life-style and would encourage them to build houses and become agriculturists.

I have explained the Protestant approach towards the Native religions, but how did Catholics try to solve the Indian Problem?

### **The Black Robes**

Maybe the best missionaries were the Jesuits. The Society of Jesus was from its origins destined to change the world. Its founder was Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish-Basque soldier, who after staying in a hospital heard the voice of God, laid down his weapons, and started this institution. In 1540, the society was sanctioned by the Pope to stand up against

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<sup>48</sup> Axtell, *Cultural origins of North America*, 170.

Protestantism and paganism. This could be done perfectly by the exercises that Loyola created for his recruits, preparing them for the effort to “conquer the whole world” and particularly “the lands of the infidel.”<sup>49</sup> Unlike Spanish and American soldiers, Jesuits relied on weapons of will and intellect. They taught the Bible and used verbal arguments and persuasion, instead of arms. The Jesuits were historically undoubtedly the best trained minds in Europe, and were the people who really went into the field to teach God’s gospel; Jesuits created boarding schools, hospitals and went to jail to teach prisoners.<sup>50</sup>

In order to convert the Indians to Catholicism, the Jesuits first had to get rid of the traditional religious leaders. Loyola argued that when religious targets were chosen “preference ought to be given to those persons and places which, through their own improvement, become a cause which can spread the good accomplished to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them. For that reason, the spiritual aid which is given to important and public persons ought to be regarded as more important, since it is a more universal good.”<sup>51</sup> But this was harder than it seemed, because the shamans and Indian priests had more functions in the tribe than just religious functions—functions that made them indispensable for the tribe. They were also doctors who knew and used several herbs and local plants for healing and also cured mental illnesses. But perhaps their most important task was their ability to predict rain and snow and the success of the hunting parties. For the tribes, all these elements were a matter of life and death because many native tribes lived in precarious environments. After the Jesuits carefully infiltrated Indian life, they tried to dispose of these religious leaders and assume their place. The Jesuits’ printed books; literacy was an important tool in the policy of disposing of the native religion. Written words and visible pictures were more credible than oral arguments, which vanished once they were spoken.

Furthermore, the Jesuits successfully replaced the traditional leaders by performing the same tasks as the shamans did. With simple mathematics, the Jesuits were able to predict solar eclipses, which fascinated and also frightened the Indians. Their knowledge about medicine saved many Indian lives. Jesuits referred to illness as a result of paganism and the absence of Christianity. This induced Indians to convert. With the use of mathematics, the Jesuits were able to explain the correlation between the moon and the tides, and by using the compass they were able to linger through the woods without getting lost. Such tools and knowledge must

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<sup>49</sup> L. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1968), 43-44.

<sup>50</sup> Axtell, *Cultural origins of North America*, 75-77.

<sup>51</sup> *The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, 275. <http://www.slideshare.net/mx0001/loyola-9618735>

have had impressed and amazed the Indians and showed them that the Jesuits had more spiritual power than their shamans.<sup>52</sup> The Jesuits sought to recreate the institutions of Catholicism and to implement these institutions in native life. They built chapels and churches, provided sacraments and the Mass, created choirs and introduced calendars.<sup>53</sup> The most difficult part of the Jesuits' crusade was to learn the Indian languages. Indian languages did not resemble European languages and most tribes had different dialects. But the Jesuits saw themselves as Christ's disciples able to overthrow Satan's empire: the Jesuits had no choice but to attack the enemy on its own soil and with its own weapons--and the most important weapon was the knowledge of the Indian dialects.

The Jesuits quickly discovered that only a few Indians would risk being the first to break with their native traditions. The reason was obvious: the Indians were afraid to be mocked or even expelled from the tribe. Indian communities were quite small, and survival of the tribe demanded maximal cooperation of every tribe member. Furthermore, unwilling to undermine internal harmony, Indians feared angering one of the natural spirits. In attacking the shaman, the greatest rival of the missionaries, the Jesuits used every tactic they knew. They tried to humiliate him in front of the tribe by calling his work child's play. But these aggressive tactics created a reaction that was the exact opposite of what the Jesuits expected. The shamans showed that the Black Robes, as the Jesuits were called, were bad men who disrespected Indian religion, and unleashed the tribe's warriors upon the missionaries.

In their crusades against the infidel, however, the Jesuits had great allies: the diseases they brought with them from Europe. Against diseases like smallpox, measles, and dysentery, the shaman's songs and dances were totally powerless. The shamans were not only unable to cure their tribesmen, who died in large numbers, but also could not prevent themselves from falling victim to these terrible diseases. This was the moment the Jesuits had been waiting for. They filled the void that the shamans had left, and showed their great heart with free nursing, providing theological explanations why these diseases happened as well as medicine. The Jesuits used many tactics to destroy the shamans' power and become the spiritual leaders of the tribe. Next to the diseases, the best tactic they had was their knowledge of western technology, which went further than only western science, and included spiritual techniques to manipulate nature. With their explanation of the diseases, they showed that they were extraordinary men, as well as men to be feared and respected, as the shamans once were.

We must not forget that not every Catholic religious organisation was keen to convert the

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<sup>52</sup> Axtell, *Cultural origins of North America*, 161.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 78.

Indians. Antonio de Montesinos, for example, told his Dominican brethren to refuse to confess to anyone who continued to oppress or enslave the Indians. He said:

You are living in deadly sin for the atrocities you tyrannically impose on these innocent people. Tell me, what right do you have to enslave them? What authority did you use to make war against them who lived at peace on their territories, killing them cruelly with methods never before heard of? How can you oppress them and not care to feed or cure them, and work them to death to satisfy your greed? ... Aren't they human beings? Have they no rational soul? Aren't you obliged to love them as you love yourselves? You may rest assured that you are in no better state of salvation than the Moors or Turks who reject the Christian Faith.<sup>54</sup>

Hence, not every Catholic felt the need to convert the Indians. However, the Jesuits did, and it can be said that they were more successful in their attempts than the Protestants. With this story in mind, it seems a bit odd that conversions on a large scale never occurred. According to James Axtell, native religion changed long before Columbus arrived, and native religion was anything except static. Tribes borrowed beliefs, myths, and artefacts from other tribes.<sup>55</sup> So if they had changed their religion once, why could they not do it twice?

### **Missionary failures**

The reason why so many Indians resisted a new conversion had to do with the fact that the missionaries completely underestimated the impact of their ideas on Indian life. There are many reasons why large-scale conversions failed, but the most important mistake that the Protestant as well as the Catholic missionaries made, was that at the time Christianity was not just a spiritual construct but a cultural product. To convert Indians did not mean Indians only had to believe in another spirit, but involved a complete transformation of their culture and identity. To convert the Indians, the Christian missionaries had to imbue them with European values and attitudes. What they presented to the Indians was a mixture that was hard to follow and understand. The Indians relied on a theory of cultural dualism to oppose the missionaries' arguments about civilization. According to the Indians, the Great Spirit created two ways of life for both races; both races had to follow their own ways. If they did not, they would be penalized by their gods for disobedience. According to the Indians, their cultures, lands, and

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<sup>54</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, ed. and trans. André Collard (New York: Harper & Roy, 1971), 183.

<sup>55</sup> Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 170.

foods were a gift from the Great Spirit and therefore the most suitable for them. To follow the white man's way of life was seen as a violation of the Holy laws, and the only way to salvation was to return to the old religion and lifestyle.<sup>56</sup> Indians remarked about the Bible: if God wanted the Indians to have the white man's religion, then God would have given them the Holy Book too. Indians could simply not understand what Christianity had to offer. As David Weber argues, "American Indians cooperated only when they believed they had something to gain from the new religion and the material benefits that accompanied it, or too much to lose from resisting it."<sup>57</sup> But if Christianity was that hard to accept, why did the Jesuits, as a few historians argue, have more successful conversions than their Protestant colleagues?

While it can be said that the Jesuits had several advantages over the Protestant missionaries, it is not true that their conversion attempts were far more successful. James Axtell concludes that after two centuries both the French and the English admitted they had completely failed to convert the Indians.<sup>58</sup> The reasons why these conversion attempts failed are not hard to find. On the contrary, it actually was a miracle that the Jesuits had achieved as much as they did. An important reason was native religion itself. The missionaries did not see the native religion as a religion, but more as superstition. But this assumption was completely inaccurate, as I have explained before. Indian religion was based upon predictions and explained the world spiritually. Despite the linguistic and cultural differences, all Indian tribes shared beliefs and practices. Why the Jesuits' conversion attempts were not as successful as they had hoped, had many causes. First, there were the epidemic diseases that the Jesuits brought with them, which the Indians blamed on the priests. As I explained, on the one hand the diseases helped the Jesuits to replace the shaman, but on the other hand many Indians blamed these diseases on Christianity. Sometimes after a Jesuit had sprinkled holy water, made signs or mumbled several Latin words, a few Indians suddenly died; this created, of course, a major obstacle in the efforts to convert the Indians. Indians knew nothing of epidemiology, and they were convinced that these deaths were caused by the baptisms. Therefore, many of them closed their ears when the priests spoke and hid their sick and dying from them.<sup>59</sup>

Another problem that the Jesuits faced was the Indians' belief in their own superiority. The Jesuits are partly to be blamed for this superiority belief. Their clothing for

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<sup>56</sup> Berkhofer, *Salvation and the savage*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> D. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 115.

<sup>58</sup> Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 164.

<sup>59</sup> J. Axtell, *The Indians New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 26.

example, black and grey robes, was absolutely unsuitable for life in the wilderness. Furthermore, the trousers that Jesuits wore, would have prevented an Indian from hunting. And the Jesuits' facial hair was very repulsive to the Indians, because hair on any other part of the body than the head was considered disgusting. Another strange phenomenon for the Indians was the Jesuits' celibacy. For Indians, it was impossible to imagine a man without a woman at his side, and many tribes opposed celibacy. For them, life without sex was hardly a life at all.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the Jesuits could not raise a wigwam, trap game and when dwelling in the woods (despite the use of their compass) they regularly got lost.

But despite these problems, the Jesuit conversion effort was indeed more successful, particularly in the Northeast, than the Protestant one. And the question arises, and this is of importance in the next chapter on the Cherokees: why did they have more success? The reason for their success is that they abandoned the policy to change native culture entirely. They tried to understand the tribal cultures in which they lived, thus creating at least some goodwill among tribe members: they were seen as "one of them." Also, one of the advantages the Jesuits had, compared with their Protestant colleagues, was the nature of Catholicism. Instead of believing in predestination (the idea that God had already decided who goes to heaven and who does not), Catholics believe in a forgiving God. Protestants denied that doing good secured a place in heaven, while Catholics encouraged people to be good and live according to moral rules so God would offer salvation. Other advantages are to be found in the fact that there were quite a few similarities between Catholicism and native religion. Like native religion, Catholicism had ceremonies and holy fragrances like incense, which was used in rituals that looked like the tobacco offerings. And like Indians, the Jesuits used hymns and chants to celebrate God's work. Also, like native religion, Catholicism is mostly a religion of tradition. We must not forget that if Indians had worshipped Jesus Christ, Christ would have been brought to "life." Indians worship elements they see and feel, and not the God inside. Catholic statues of saints and Jesus Christ helped to make Jesus real for the Indians. Through nuns and the Virgin Mary, the Jesuits even had role models for Indian women. Perhaps the most important advantage the Jesuits had, however, was their attitude towards Indian culture. Of course they sought to change the Indians' religious convictions, just as the Protestants did, but they were more willing to adopt Indian culture to achieve their goals. Instead of condemning and trying to destroy what they found, the Jesuits studied native culture and tried to reshape it from the inside.

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<sup>60</sup> Axtell, *Cultural origins of North America*, 79.



In comparison, Protestant Indian policies were simply harsh. Instead of living among the tribes, they took Indian children away from their families and put them in boarding schools or made them apprentices. In England, English children were being apprenticed to a “master” in a trade for a few years: living at their master’s side, they were educated, disciplined, and trained. The English in the New World, coping with a lack of skilled labor, used apprenticeships as a method to civilize the Indians in boarding schools.<sup>61</sup> These boarding schools failed for several reasons. First of all, Indian parents were not keen on sending their children to the English missionaries. Furthermore, most Indians expected many more results from reading and writing. Educating the natives lead to misunderstandings between Indians and missionaries. The Sioux, for example, thought that if they wrote a wish down on paper and sent it to a missionary, the wish would be granted. When the missionary said that God could not grant this wish, the Indians became angry, did not want to go to school and complained that the Holy Bible was fake and told lies.<sup>62</sup> The Indians reasoned that the missionaries should pay the Indian families in return for sending their children to the schools. When the missionaries refused to pay, the Indians refused to send their children.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the children preferred to play on Indian lands or go hunting in the Plains instead of learning the white men’s culture.<sup>64</sup> Many children ran away, because they loved their freedom too much. They also had problems living with children who spoke a different language and had different cultural habits. Protestants favored schools because they believed that the school was the first line of defence against Satan, Catholicism, and heresy more generally. This worked well for English children but Indians had to be motivated--mostly by force. The boarding schools were not suited for Indian children because these children faced conditions that were completely new to them. They were miles away from home, suffering from homesickness. Moreover, they faced European diseases, prejudice, and punishments they had never experienced before. And, finally, most Indians knew that it did not matter how Christian they became; white people would still see them as savages and as inferior. So why adopt the Christian faith? Despite their superior technologies, their weapons, proselytizing religion, and their imperialist behavior, the European invaders had not much success in converting the Indians to the European way of life.

Mixed with Christian convictions were “Darwinian” ideas about Native Americans.

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<sup>61</sup> J. Axtell, *The School upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), chs. 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*

General James Carleton, a general who campaigned several times against the Navaho, for example, explained the rapid decrease of the Indian population in Darwinist terms, referring to “The causes which the Almighty originates when in their appointed time he wills that one race of men shall disappear of the face of the earth and give place to another race.”<sup>65</sup>

To stimulate this evolutionary process, however, from the eighteenth century onward political plans were formed to ensure the removal and disappearance of Indian tribes.

### **Governmental policies**

While the American Revolution did not immediately change the government’s Indian policies, it did influence American definitions of civilization. Civilization in this period, according to many Americans, meant liberal, economic individualism. As a result, the policy of the government had to be focussed on providing liberty to all white citizens. Since this liberty was seen as the superior way of life, it was the American task (Manifest Destiny) to spread this superior culture.<sup>66</sup> The American government saw the native tribes as foreign nations, and made new treaties with them. These treaties were, however, overwhelmingly violated by white settlers on the frontier, who had little respect for either their own government or the Indians. In the settled eastern states, people hoped that the Indian lands in the West could be taken over, and that the Indians who lived there would automatically be absorbed by the white population.

In 1786, Indian affairs were placed under the rule of the national government.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the *Northwest Ordinance* of 1787 and the *Constitution* of 1789 created an Indian policy that aimed to protect Indians. The *Northwest Ordinance* defined the manner in which the United States government would deal with the Indian nations. Section 14, Article 3 of the *Ordinance* proclaimed:

The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; but laws founded in justice and humanity, shall from

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<sup>65</sup> H. Fritz, *The movement for Indian assimilation, 1860-1890* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 121.

<sup>66</sup> Berkhofer, *Salvation and the savage*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Pearce, *The savages of America*, 54.

time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them.<sup>68</sup>

However, again these laws were widely violated by white men living near the frontier. Americans were moving westward rapidly and forced Indians to become civilized. The Indians, however, held on to their own culture, which led to problems between Indians and whites. It was obvious to the American government that the only humane solution to solve the Indian Problem was to assimilate the Indians into white culture. The question that rose was how this could be done most effectively. Government officials believed they were dealing with people who differed dramatically from white people, and saw white culture as superior. President George Washington's Indian policy therefore looked for funding to create a civilization program that with the help of Christianity and education would enable the Indians within half a century to catch up with other Americans and become equal citizens. The program was designed to turn Indians into farmers and agriculturists by giving them horses, axes and other utensils so they could cultivate the land. Furthermore the program induced them to learn English and to become Christians.<sup>69</sup>

Washington expected all Indians who lived east of the Mississippi to live as agriculturists, give up their independence, and live happily together as equal citizens in the next fifty years. Around 1795, Washington sent craftsmen and missionaries to provide teaching and moral training. In short, the melting pot idea of assimilation was to be promoted by mission schools for Indians in the same way that public schools would assimilate men from the non-English nations of Europe.<sup>70</sup> Not only missionaries, but white civilians as well, had an important task in this matter. Teachers, blacksmiths, farmers and carpenters were forced to educate the Natives in their occupation.<sup>71</sup> But teaching Indians the value of hard labor and individual industry was a very complicated task. The farmers, blacksmiths and carpenters, who had to teach the Indians their skills, were paid out of annuity funds. Therefore, the Indians saw these people as servants instead of teachers. A few Indians started farming on a small scale, but these attempts to turn Indians into farmers were very difficult because the Indians had no interest in the possession of land: it was against their spiritual beliefs.

The Native Americans' resistance to assimilation meant that increasingly whites were anxious for changes in Indian policy, to ensure white control of valuable land; they advocated

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<sup>68</sup> Northwest Ordinance; July 13, 1787, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/nworder.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/nworder.asp).

<sup>69</sup> McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870*, 38.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>71</sup> A. Hoopes, *Indian Affairs and Their Administration, 1849-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), 48-49.

“containing” Indians who refused to give up their own cultures. Over the next two decades, debates over their status and location would end in Indian Removal, a policy that would have a dramatic effect on all Indians, but especially on Southern tribes. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 made it possible to move the Indians to an area where they could not prevent the spread of civilization and where they had a chance to survive while keeping their own culture. This place had to be west of the Mississippi on land that no white man wanted to have. Whites as well as a few Indians embraced this solution. To put it into practice, the government of the United States came up with three treaties: *The Rush-Bagot* agreement in 1817, *The Convention* in 1818 and *The Adams-Onis Treaty* in 1819. All these agreements created a difficult situation for the Indians, in that the treaties made clear that these tribes were seen as a great obstacle to ‘Manifest Destiny’.<sup>72</sup> Still, it took until the 1820s and 1830s before the government could introduce a removal policy, wherein Indians east of the Mississippi would trade their lands for western lands (which were considered more suitable for savage use). It was John C. Calhoun, President Monroe's Secretary of War, who came up with the plan to relocate several eastern tribes beyond the area of white settlements.<sup>73</sup> Calhoun believed that if the Indians refused to adopt the white man’s lifestyle, the Indian eventually would vanish.<sup>74</sup> The same message was given by Andrew Jackson when he said:

It has long been the policy of Government to introduce among them the arts of civilization, in the hope of gradually reclaiming them from a wandering life. This policy has, however, been coupled with another wholly incompatible with its success. Since Indians are surrounded by the whites with their arts of civilization, which by destroying the resources of the savage doom him to weakness and decay, the fate of the Mohegan, the Narragansett, and the Delaware is fast over-taking the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Creek. That this fate surely awaits them if they remain within the limits of the States does not admit of a doubt.<sup>75</sup>

American assimilation policies reached a turning point when General Andrew Jackson became President in 1829. Andrew Jackson believed in the 1820s that Indians were subjects of the United States, not foreign powers, and that decisions about political matters should be made under that assumption. In a letter he wrote in 1820 to John Calhoun (Jackson was a

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<sup>72</sup> Fritz, *The movement for Indian assimilation, 1860-1890*, 16.

<sup>73</sup> J. Calhoun, *Civilizing the Indians.*, American State Papers, Indian Affairs, nr.201, September 3, 1819. [http://archive.org/stream/correspondenceof00calhrich/correspondenceof00calhrich\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/correspondenceof00calhrich/correspondenceof00calhrich_djvu.txt)

<sup>74</sup> Calhoun, *Civilizing the Indians.*

<sup>75</sup> A. Jackson, State of the Union Adress, 1829. <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/andrew-jackson/state-of-the-nation-1829.php>

general at that time), he completely rejected the U.S. Policy of assimilation that was put into practice by George Washington: “To treat with Indians acknowledging our sovereignty ... has always appeared very absurd to me.... It appears to me that it is high time to do away with the farce of treating with Indian tribe”<sup>76</sup>

Thus, Andrew Jackson changed the Indian policies his predecessors John Adams and George Washington had put in place. President Jackson decided that a new federal policy was necessary in order to remove the Indians from their lands. In 1830 he supported the Indian Removal Act whereby the President had the right to forcibly remove tribes from their lands against their will. In Jackson’s first inaugural address in 1829, he promised: “It will be my sincere and constant desire to observe toward the Indian tribes within our limits a just and liberal policy, and to give that humane and considerate attention to their rights and their wants which is consistent with the habits of our Government and the feelings of our people.”<sup>77</sup> But his first annual message to Congress made clear that Jackson was eager to remove the Indian people from the states. In 1830, Congress, at President Jackson’s urging, passed the Indian Removal Act. Between 1830 and 1840, the U.S. Army forcibly removed approximately 100,000 Indians from their lands to the west. Many others were massacred before they left<sup>78</sup> However, white settlements were still being built upon Indian lands so it became increasingly difficult to rely on the concept of an exclusively Indian area. Around mid- century, the idea had become impossible. Farmers had no regard for Indian rights and were increasingly occupying Indian land.

The problem of the Federal Government in this case was that the whole Removal Act did not take into account changing conditions. It was merely a temporary measure. Later it would be impossible to remove the tribes to the west. Furthermore, this removal policy was counterproductive. Moving Indians from place to place prevented the Indians from settling, the very purpose in the campaign to civilize them. Many scholars incorrectly consider the Removal Act as the most important document in the entire Indian assimilation history. One of the most important documents justifying Indian Removal, as well as the assimilation program itself, is the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution declares that “no new State shall be formed or erected within the jurisdiction of any other State.” If the U.S. government is not permitted to tolerate the creation of a foreign and independent government, then it has no other choice than

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<sup>76</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Calhoun on September 2, 1820.

[http://www.archive.org/stream/correspondenceof00calhrich/correspondenceof00calhrich\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/correspondenceof00calhrich/correspondenceof00calhrich_djvu.txt)

<sup>77</sup> A. Jackson, First Annual Message to Congress, 8 December 1829.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29471#axzz2j1UqIs3B>

<sup>78</sup> [http://americanindiantah.com/history/nar\\_19thcenturyrelations.html](http://americanindiantah.com/history/nar_19thcenturyrelations.html). .

to 'destroy' these Indian tribes, who were seen as foreign nations.

I have sketched the American government's assimilation policy and the Protestant and Catholic missionaries' efforts to deal with the Indians. But how did the Cherokee tribe respond to these policies and the missionaries' crusade?

## Part II

### The most civilized tribe in America

*Each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice.  
Barbarians are no more marvellous to us than we are to them,  
nor for better cause.*

- Michel de Montaigne-

In this part I will first of all describe the Cherokee culture, history, and tribe system and then delineate their response to government policies and the missionaries' conversion efforts. Like many Indian tribes, the Cherokees fought against white settlers. The wars they were involved in did not take place continuously, but came in phases. After a while, treaties were signed and a new war only began when a treaty was violated. By 1794, however, the Cherokees stopped warring against the United States. By 1825, they were known as "the most civilized tribe in America." Despite the trauma of their forced departure to the West on the Trail of Tears in 1838, which I will describe later, they managed to rebuild their social and political order, to prosper, and to become once again a showpiece of Indian acculturation. They had a constitution modelled on that of the United States: they elected a chief, vice-chief and they had an effective judiciary with a jury system. They also published a newspaper, the *Cherokee Advocate*, and they built windmills, sawmills and used the white man's tools to cultivate the land. But why did they assimilate in the first place?

#### **Cherokee history and culture.**

Between 10,000 and 20,000 Cherokees, or *ahniyvwiya* (which literally means Real People<sup>79</sup>) lived on the lands in the early 1700s. Cherokee tribal lands were once immense. Their exact boundaries are unknown, but it is stated that the land extended from the Ohio River south to Atlanta, Georgia, and from the eastern seaboard west to Virginia and North- and South Carolina across Tennessee and Alabama towards the Illinois River. By the time of the American Revolution, their lands began to shrink. In 1830, Cherokee county, as it was called, only encompassed the area of Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Alabama.

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<sup>79</sup> J. Mooney "Myths of the Cherokee," in: *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology 1897-98, Part I. [1900]* 510. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/cher/motc/>

During this period of land loss, gold was discovered on the Cherokee lands and the Cherokee faced an invasion of fortune seekers and gold diggers from Georgia.<sup>80</sup> Instead of being involved in massive hunting on the Plains, the Cherokees lived in forests where they cultivated crops. In the beginning of the 1740s, the Cherokees began to use cows, because most of the deer had vanished. Indians only killed as many animals as they needed, and used all parts of the animal for food, clothing, and weapons. They also thanked the Great Spirit for providing them with these animals. But with the arrival of the white race, hunting became big business, which resulted in the near extinction of the buffalo herds and also the scarcity of the deer.

Because their territory was so large and located in the east, the Cherokees were one of the first indigenous tribes to come in contact with the French and the British. The Cherokees were one of the tribes who did not live in tipis, but in square houses made of poles or logs; these consisted of three rooms and most of them were two stories high.<sup>81</sup> The Cherokees, despite their large numbers, were only occasionally in contact with other tribes; they were relatively isolated. It was the environment that also isolated Cherokees from one another. A few Cherokees in one region fought with Shawnees while others fought with Creeks. The Cherokee tribe was divided into four sections, with each section having an identity of its own. In the east on the mountain slopes were the settlements of the Lower Cherokees. Near the Tennessee River lived the Overhill Cherokees. This geographic division also led to differences in dialect. The Lower Cherokees spoke *Elati*, a dialect that is now extinct; the Overhill and Valley settlements spoke *Atali*; and the Middle settlements spoke *Kituhwa*.<sup>82</sup> These divisions did not make the Cherokees an atypical tribe. Many tribes were divided into subtribes, with their own languages and values. The Cherokees, however, were in some respects atypical. First, by 1830, twenty-five percent of them were descendants of mixed white-Indian ancestry, which meant they had an advantage over other tribes in the process of acculturation. Second, many Cherokees adopted the institution of black slavery (as did other south-eastern tribes); they were multiracial, like white society. Third, their acculturation went so fast that they were given the title of “the most civilized tribe in America.”

The Cherokees experienced few contacts with white settlers before 1699. Of course, they were in touch with the British and French, but this did not result in intensive relationships. James Mooney, an American ethnographer who had lived among the Cherokees

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<sup>80</sup> Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust*, 116.

<sup>81</sup> F. Gearing, *Priests and Warriors* (Arlington: The American Anthropological Association, 1962), 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.



for several years, described in his book *Myths of the Cherokee* the Cherokee myths and historical traditions. He also describes the first contacts with whites:

One story relates how the first whites came from the east and tried to enter into friendly relations, but the Indians would have nothing to do with them for a long time. At last the whites left a jug of whisky and a dipper near a spring frequented by the Indians. The Indians came along, tasted the liquor, which they had never known before, and liked it so well that they ended by all getting comfortably drunk. While they were in this happy frame of mind some white men came up, and this time the Indians shook hands with them and they have been friends after a fashion ever since. This may possibly be a Cherokee adaptation of the story of Hudson's first landing on the island of Manhattan.<sup>83</sup>

After a while, more and more white settlers arrived, which led to more intensive contact between Cherokees and Europeans. By 1707, trade relations with the people in Carolina led to the first trading act with the white government in Charles Town. But in 1715, the relations between whites and Cherokees became hostile when many Cherokees from different regions joined the Yamassees in their war against Carolina. In the early and mid-eighteenth century, the Cherokees were fully aware that the English could be very hostile and that the English wished to stay in the country they had recently discovered. In 1756, a delegation of the Cherokees went to the Creek tribe to warn them against the English. "The English have now a mind to make slaves of us all, for they have already filled our nation with English forts and guns, Negroes and cattle."<sup>84</sup>

Unlike tribes such as the Pawnee or the Navaho, the Cherokees were not aggressive or war mongering. The key element in Cherokee religion was the necessity of spiritual harmony among all interrelated elements. Some Cherokee myths spoke of the separate creation of red, white, and black people by the Great Spirit. These myths declared that the red man always was God's favorite, and that the way of life given to each of the three races was different (hunting to the Indian, agriculture to the African and manufacturing to the white man). God did not want changes made in their ways of life, so efforts to civilize and Christianize the Indians were against the will of the Great Spirit. Furthermore, they believed that the Great Spirit placed each race on its own continent. So the enslaving of the Africans by the

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<sup>83</sup> J. Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokee", <http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/cher/motc/>

<sup>84</sup> "Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy's Captivity among Cherokee Indians, 1741-1742," in: *Travels in the American Colonies*, (New York, 1961), 253.

Europeans was against God's will, and created serious disharmony in the cosmos. It was this striving for harmony that was of major importance in Cherokee culture.<sup>85</sup> Like other Indian tribes, the Cherokees had a rational religion, with a Great Spirit and a Bad Spirit, and they believed that the Great Spirit was superior to the Bad Spirit. The Cherokees also believed in a Heaven which consisted of all the beauties which an Indian could imagine with forests, fruits, and game.<sup>86</sup> The bad place, or what Christians called Hell, was the direct opposite of Heaven. Witches and wizards pretended to possess supernatural powers and to have intercourse with infernal Spirits and were supposedly capable of transforming themselves into the shape of beasts of the forest and used their powers to oppress those who attacked the tribes' harmony.

Cherokee relations with Europeans and other Indians were part of the jurisdiction of each of their independent villages. A decision by a village, however, was subject to outside influence: coordination of decisions among several villages occurred. This could be done because Cherokee villages shared an identical culture: all of them spoke one of the three dialects and members of one village usually shared a dialect with about fifteen other villages. Remarkably, the Cherokee chiefs were without power. All Cherokee policy was made in council: an outvoted minority was regarded as the root of conflict, and, more importantly, a perfect source of disharmony. Unfortunately nothing can be said about certain policy areas or other reasons for the chiefs' powerlessness, because those records do not exist. However, one can speculate that to all probability the idea of cooperation had something to do with it. Traditionally, decisions by an Indian tribe involve the holding of discussions until a consensus is reached; only then action will be taken. In this way all tribe members are involved in tribal politics, and a chief is only as strong as the cooperation amongst his tribe members.<sup>87</sup> The Cherokee chiefs were probably powerless, because the tribe had to reach unanimous decisions, and because an outvoted minority was regarded as a sign of disharmony that eventually would lead to conflicts.<sup>88</sup> The Cherokee tribe before 1730 represented a collection of rural and peaceful communities that usually did not make war with others. Among the tribe members, there was a great tendency to settle disputes peacefully.<sup>89</sup>

Although their nation was divided into four sections which had their own dialects, Cherokee history and culture was what held them together (even though a few Cherokees of the Lower Cherokees probably came from the north, while the Cherokees of the Overhill and

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<sup>85</sup> C. Hudson, *The Southern Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 120-185.

<sup>86</sup> As I explained in Chapter I, to believe in Heaven and Hell was not common in Native religion, and the fact that the Cherokees did, set them apart from other tribes.

<sup>87</sup> J. T. Garret, *The Cherokee Full Circle* (Rochester: Bear & Company, 2002), 25.

<sup>88</sup> Gearing, *Priests and Warriors*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, 79.

Valley sections came from the west). According to Fred Gearing, this common culture, language, and history caused warriors from different sections to join other villages. We can talk about the Cherokees as a whole (as a unified people).<sup>90</sup> Since in this study the Indians' political life is important, I will deal with villages and not Cherokee settlements; it was the Cherokee village, formed by one or a few settlements, that was the political center. Cherokees believed that Cherokee villages should peacefully coexist. According to Gearing this sentiment was created by a common history. A far more important role has to be attributed to the desire for harmony, however. In Cherokees history and society the word harmony is of central importance: this thesis will show that harmony is one of the key reasons why the Cherokees assimilated more successfully than any other tribe. This perspective is backed by John Phillip Reid who states that "The key to the Cherokee legal mind was the Cherokees' desire for social harmony."<sup>91</sup> For Cherokees, sustaining harmony among themselves, the natural spirits and within the tribe was of the utmost importance. Cherokee culture is one in which the survival of the individual is synonymous with the survival of the whole tribe. And according to Cherokee J.T. Garrett, till this day the key to Cherokee values and attitudes is the conviction that one has to be strong and endure while belonging to a group, while respecting nature, the tribe elders, family and the tribe.<sup>92</sup> Garrett mentions several stories about medicine elders and other special persons coming together in the mountains during certain times of the year to seek medicine together for bringing about harmony in their world.<sup>93</sup>

In Cherokee theology the punishments that the Great Spirit inflicted upon those who failed to act in harmony with spiritual laws might first bring only harm to the individual and his family. But ultimately this failure would harm the whole tribe. Tribal rituals were necessary to sustain order and harmony. Disorder came into the world from the evil spirits who lived beneath the earth in the watery world and entered this world through springs, caves, and other holes in the earth. Disorder also came when people did not behave correctly in relation to others or when people abused the natural world. As a Cherokee elder once said, "The source of harmony is not having disharmony."<sup>94</sup> And disharmony could be averted by discouraging boisterous behavior.

Even in relation to the white settlers who were the greatest threat to Cherokees life and peace the Cherokee maintained the principle of harmony. Despite King George III's 1763

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<sup>90</sup> Ibidem, 80.

<sup>91</sup> J.P. Reid, *A Law of Blood* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1970), 249.

<sup>92</sup> Garret, *The Cherokee Full Circle*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem, 17.

<sup>94</sup> Ibidem, 101.

proclamation forbidding individuals to settle on Indian lands, the white settlers came and came and pressed forward.<sup>95</sup> After 1775 most colonial governments attempted to purchase the lands from native tribes. The Cherokees agreed with this political measure, again to keep the peace. When they came into contact with white society several Cherokees saw the advantages of the white lifestyle. The reason why is easy to understand. Sooner or later, the Indians knew, contact with white people involved them in a global economy in which they were prisoners as well as players. In 1753, the chief of the Lower Cherokees, *Skiagunsta*, told Governor Glen:

I have always told my People to be well with the English for they cannot expect any supply from anywhere else, nor can they live independent of the English. What are we Red People? The clothes we wear, we cannot make ourselves, they are made for us. We use their ammunition with which we kill deer. We cannot make our guns, they are made for us. Every necessary thing in life we must have from the White People.<sup>96</sup>

The Indians' dependence on English products and the implications of that dependence upon Indian life were also seen by "Tattooed Serpent," a war chief of the Natchez. In a conversation with a Frenchman he said:

Before they came, did we not live better than we do now? In what respect, then, had we occasion for them: Was it for their guns? The bows and arrows which we used were sufficient to make us live well. Was it for their white, blue and red blankets? We can do well enough with buffalo skins which are warmer. In fine, before the arrival of the French, we lived like men who can be satisfied with what they have; whereas at this day we are like slaves, who are not suffered to do as they please.<sup>97</sup>

And the more the Cherokee Nation was willing to assimilate, the more it had to face the consequences. One major implication or consequence was intermarriage. The Cherokee tribe had more intermarriages with white people than any other tribe and many Cherokees had, as a result, acquired "white" customs and viewpoints.<sup>98</sup> When married to a Cherokee, a white man became a member of the tribe and was treated as such. These intermarriages in turn were a major factor in the Cherokees' willingness to assimilate. Most white people who became members of the tribe certainly did not reject their European habits, so the Cherokee Nation became heavily influenced by white habits. And the offspring of these intermarriages,

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<sup>95</sup> Gearing, *Priests and Warriors*, 99.

<sup>96</sup> Chief *Skiagunsta* quoted in: J. Axtell, *The Indians New South*, (1997), 70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>98</sup> G. Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 360.

the so-called “mixed-bloods,” would play a critical part during the period of the Removal. The Cherokees’ cultural values changed to such an extent with the influence of the white people that they even changed their Cherokee Constitution in 1827 when they wrote: “Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government, the preservation of liberty, and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged in this nation.”<sup>99</sup>

### **Americanization**

The question that rises is: how it is possible that the Cherokees seemed to be keen on acculturation? The answer to this question consists of many factors. First of all, there are several similarities between Christianity and the Cherokee religion. The Cherokees had a few rituals that had certain similarities with Christianity, like a form of baptism whereby a Cherokee spread water over his head to find salvation from sin. The Cherokees feared death if these rituals were not performed. Moreover, they believed in an afterlife. These were all themes which Christians could use. Furthermore, several Cherokee myths were strangely familiar, like the Bible stories. An example is the story in which a man was swallowed by a big fish.<sup>100</sup>

Secondly, George Washington’s policies had an impact upon Cherokee life. Washington’s ideas came forward in his famous speech “Talk to the Cherokees,” which he held on August 29, 1796. In this speech, Washington tried to persuade the Cherokee tribe to assimilate; otherwise, they would vanish.

Beloved Cherokees, You now find that the game with which your woods once abounded, are growing scarce; and you know when you cannot meet a deer or other game to kill, that you must remain hungry; you know also when you can get no skins by hunting, that the traders will give you neither powder nor clothing; and you know that without other implements for tilling the ground than the hoe, you will continue to raise only scanty crops of corn. Hence you are sometimes exposed to suffer much from hunger and cold; and as the game are lessening in numbers more and more, these sufferings will increase. And how are you to provide against them? Listen to my words and you will know.... Some among you already experience the advantage of

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<sup>99</sup> Article VI, Sec. 10, Constitution of 1827.

[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning\\_history/indian\\_removal/ Cherokee\\_constitution.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/indian_removal/ Cherokee_constitution.cfm)

<sup>100</sup> *Anthropological Papers*, 187.

keeping cattle and hogs: let all keep them and increase their numbers, and you will ever have a plenty of meet. To these add sheep, and they will give you cloathing as well as food. Your lands are good and of great extent. By proper management you can raise livestock not only for your own wants, but to sell to the White people. By using the plow you can vastly increase your crops of corn. You can also grow wheat, (which makes the best bread) as well as other useful grain. To these you will easily add flax and cotton, which you may dispose of to the White people, or have it made up by your own women into cloathing for yourselves. Your wives and daughters can soon learn to spin and weave.<sup>101</sup>

The words that George Washington spoke during this speech must have had a great impression on the Cherokee nation. The leader of the people who colonized their lands said they would starve and suffer if they did not assimilate. And this suffering would eventually lead to disharmony. It is quite understandable that many Cherokees were eager to adopt the white lifestyle. Not only President Washington was putting pressure on the Cherokees; many political leaders in the United States did exactly that as well. When, in May 1806, a delegation of the Cherokees visited Thomas Jefferson, he gave them advice on how they could improve their condition: “You are becoming farmers, learning the use of the plough and the hoe, enclosing your grounds and employing that labour in their cultivation which you formerly employed in hunting and war... You will find your next want to be mills to grind corn, which by relieving your women from the loss of time beating into meal, will enable to spin and weave more.”<sup>102</sup> John Calhoun, who was the Secretary of War at the time, spoke to a Cherokee delegation in 1819 and likewise urged them to become like whites. He said:

....You are now becoming like the white people; you can no longer live by hunting, but must work for your subsistence. In your new condition, far less land is necessary for you. Your great object ought to be to hold your land separate among yourselves, as you white neighbours; and so live and bring up your children in the same way as they do, and gradually to adopt their laws and manners. It is thus only that you can be prosperous and happy. Without this, you will find you will have to emigrate, or become extinct as a people. You see that the Great Spirit has made our form of society

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<sup>101</sup> G. Washington, *Talk to the Cherokees*, August 29, 1796.

<http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3941>.

<sup>102</sup> G. Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 353.

stronger than yours, and you must submit to adopt ours, if you wish to be happy by pleasing him.<sup>103</sup>

Like Washington, Calhoun proclaimed that if the Cherokees did not assimilate, they would become extinct. But more interesting is the phrase in Calhoun's speech, "the Great Spirit has made our form of society stronger than yours, and you must submit to adopt ours, if you wish to be happy by pleasing him." Why would Calhoun say this? Is it to show that the white people are stronger and eventually would overrun them? That is hard to believe. Although he was a Secretary of War, Calhoun was not simply a show-off threatening the Indians by force. Calhoun shows, in a brilliant political message, that he is fully aware of the Cherokees' fear for disharmony. What he said in this last phrase is that the Great Spirit created the white men as a stronger kind of people, and He did it with a purpose. He sent the white people to the New World to educate the Indians. If Indians did not follow, they would not obey the Great Spirit's will, and disharmony would occur. Unwilling to disobey the Great Spirit, many Cherokees chose assimilation.

However, this does not mean that this process took place quickly. In 1805, when the missionary effort took off, the bulk of Cherokees had little interest in Christianity or education. As of 1810, the missionaries had made little impact upon the Cherokees who had just begun to abandon their hunting life for a farming life. The negative Native American responses to missionaries are far easier to document than the positive ones, as I showed in Chapter I. This is as true for the Cherokees as for any other tribe. But there were several missionaries who managed to gain the Cherokees' respect, admiration, and even warm friendship. The two qualities that appealed most to the Cherokees were the willingness to treat them as equals and the missionaries' open support in disputes with the federal government.<sup>104</sup> Reverend Daniel S. Butrick of the American Board made a lifelong effort to treat the Cherokees as equals. In 1818, he went to live with a Cherokee family in order to learn the native language. He publicly opposed removal and remained in the East with the Cherokees who refused to remove after the fraudulent removal treaty of 1835 was signed (which I will describe in detail further on).<sup>105</sup> In this case, it can be said that the reverend took over the Catholic approach of missionary conduct.

By far the most successful missionary was the reverend Evan Jones. Jones, who

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<sup>103</sup> J. Calhoun, February 11, 1819.

[http://www.archive.org/stream/correspondenceof00calhrich/correspondenceof00calhrich\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/correspondenceof00calhrich/correspondenceof00calhrich_djvu.txt)

<sup>104</sup> McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870*, 28.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*.

belonged to the Baptist church, served as a missionary to the Cherokees from 1821 until 1872. Evan Jones had begun translating parts of the Bible into the Cherokee language as early as 1822. In 1841, Jones began translating the entire Bible. He worked mostly with the full bloods, sided with the Cherokees against the policy of the Jackson administration and walked with them on the Trail of Tears. And above all, he was officially honored with a full membership of the tribe and with a pension of the Tribes treasury, as a reward for his services for the Cherokee nation.<sup>106</sup> One of the important reasons why the Cherokees progressed so rapidly was the invention of the Cherokee alphabet by a Cherokee man called *Sequoyah*, who did not speak English. He thought there was a magic in the written word, and that who could read it would be set apart from other people. Inspired by this thought of expressing the sense and sounds of the Cherokee language on paper, he worked for years and invented an alphabet of eighty-five characters that could be used by members of the Cherokee tribe. This alphabet was so simple that almost every person could learn it in a few days and soon it was used by the majority of the tribe. Soon a printing press was set up in the nation and the *Cherokee Phoenix* was printed, part in English and part in Cherokee. This invention was very important because this paper contributed greatly to the literacy of the tribe. Many Cherokees became able to read the Bible (although the entire Bible has never been translated in the Cherokee language; only the New Testament was translated). Later on, *Sequoyah* became a schoolteacher and printed a new newspaper, the *Cherokee Advocate*, which was printed in Cherokee, and so he carried on with his work.<sup>107</sup> This shows us that many Cherokees influenced each other because Cherokees were eager to learn from their neighbors. A good example of how Cherokees influenced each other is the story of *Lahtotauyie*, a Cherokee woman who married Edward Graves, an English Christian who told his wife and children about God and the Savior Jesus Christ. *Lahtotauyie* told this to her neighbors and some of them would meet in her house for prayer.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, the Cherokees showed their willingness to assimilate. But in the late 1820s, a clash with the State of Georgia would discourage this assimilation and, furthermore, lead to one of the saddest events in Indian history.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, 30.

<sup>107</sup> G. Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 371.

<sup>108</sup> *Anthropological Papers*, 196.



## **Cherokee Nation vs. Georgia Case and the road to Removal**

Before I describe the Cherokee nation vs. Georgia case, I need to sketch the political environment in the United States during those years. The progress of the Cherokees' acculturation spread throughout the nation and seemed to create a new era of tolerance towards American Indians. In some instances, as with the Cherokees, the Indian tribes maintained ownership of large tracts of land that became surrounded by white settlers. The Cherokees maintained property rights in a very large area surrounded by lands occupied by whites. This situation led to frequent conflict between the white settlers and Cherokees. President Washington's policy of acculturation and peaceful intercourse with Indians tribes was fiercely criticised by white settlers who lived near the frontier. According to the motto that "you can't tame a savage," they were looking to seize the Indians territory.<sup>109</sup>

The United States government committed itself to upholding the Treaty of Hopewell, negotiated with the Cherokees in 1785. With this treaty the government agreed to protect the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation. How the federal government's policies and the white's racism on the frontier could lead to a clash is exemplified by the Cherokee nation vs Georgia case.

In 1802 the US government signed a compact with the state of Georgia, in which the state would give up all its claims to lands that laid in the west, in return for a promise that the federal government would extinguish the Indian titles to lands that were within Georgia boundaries. From 1790 until the 1820s, the policy of the U.S. government was to deal with Indian tribes as they would have done with foreign powers. The major problem was that a few Indian tribes resided within the boundaries of U.S. states. Therefore, several politicians raised questions about the legality of the sovereignty of these Indian tribes living within one of these states.

The Cherokees, however, believed they had a permanent right to their lands within the state of Georgia. The members of the nation who had been hunters had decided to migrate to western lands where they could return to a hunting lifestyle without a chance that conflicts with white people would occur. The remaining Cherokees attempted to assimilate into white culture by becoming agriculturists. The problem, however, was that the Cherokee Nation had signed treaties with the federal government guaranteeing the boundaries of their ancestral lands and their sovereignty. Increasingly irritated by the Treaty of Hopewell, Georgia focused

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<sup>109</sup> G. Magliocca, "The Cherokee Removal and The Fourteenth Amendment," in: *Duke Law Journal*, Vol. 53, Dec. 2003, 883.

on the missionaries and other whites living within the Nation who supported the Cherokees in their efforts to maintain independence. These supporters of Cherokees independence were described by Congressman Wilson Lumpkin as "the fanatics..., from these philanthropic ranks, flocking in upon the poor Cherokees, like the caterpillars and locusts of Egypt."<sup>110</sup>

In 1824, Georgia forced Congress to open an inquiry into the missionaries' federal funding. The Cherokees, however, declared their independence and claimed absolute sovereignty within their borders. This was seen by Georgia as a provocation, and convinced Georgians to take drastic action. Over the next few years, Georgia passed a series of measures (partly resembling Nazi Germany's Nuremberg laws) which gave the Cherokees second-class status and persuaded them to leave the State.

These measures were created to end the Cherokee Nation's independence, to annex the tribe's land and to annul not only all their laws and ordinances, but also all contracts between Cherokees and whites. More broadly, the Georgia measures meant that the Cherokees were now considered "people of color," which meant that they had the same status as the Blacks had; they could not vote or serve in the militia of Georgia. Furthermore, the new laws provided that all white males who wanted to live within the Cherokee land needed licenses which they could only receive after swearing an oath to recognize Georgia's sovereignty.<sup>111</sup>

At that period approximately fifty-six whites were living in the Cherokee Nation, of whom about eighteen were pastors while the rest were farmers, teachers, and mechanics who all supported Cherokee independence. Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, John Ross, argued that Georgia had no right to do this. Prior to passing the Indian Removal Bill, despite the Cherokee Nation's efforts to "civilize" themselves and assimilate into white culture, the state of Georgia sought to remove them from their state and gain title to their land. A delegation of Georgia sent a letter to President James Monroe on March 10, 1824, which stated that "...If the Cherokees are unwilling to remove, the causes of that unwillingness are to be traced to the United States. If a peaceable purchase cannot be made in the ordinary mode, nothing remains to be done but to order their removal to a designated territory, beyond the limits of Georgia..."<sup>112</sup>

The presidency of Andrew Jackson came to Georgia's rescue. Instead of considering the Indian tribes as sovereign nations, Jackson argued that they were aliens who had no rights and were subordinates of the United States. These convictions symbolized the deep racism

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<sup>110</sup> Ibidem, 884.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem, 886.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from the Georgia Delegation in Congress to President James Monroe, March 10, 1824.  
[http://historyproject.ucdavis.edu/lessons/view\\_lesson.php?id=22](http://historyproject.ucdavis.edu/lessons/view_lesson.php?id=22)

that pervaded the Jackson administration. Jackson's war against tribal sovereignty and Indian rights focused more on Congress than on the court. One of Jackson's first innovations was his use of the veto power. Jackson argued that a President could ignore congressional authority and should follow his own constitutional agenda. This innovation was justified by arguing that the President was the only national official who was elected democratically and was therefore a better representative of the will of the people than members of Congress.<sup>113</sup> The clash between Georgia and the Cherokee Nation was the perfect opportunity for Jackson to initiate his transformation in the presidency. In fact, Georgia waited until Jackson was elected before it passed its measures against the Cherokees. President Jackson proposed a bill authorizing the federal government to assist the Cherokees' removal from Georgia if the tribe refused to submit to Georgia's state law.

In January 1829, John Ross led a delegation to Washington to seek Federal protection of the boundary of their tribal lands within the state of Georgia. The Cherokees asked the Federal government for an injunction against the laws that the state of Georgia had passed. The Supreme Court, however, refused. It ruled that it had no jurisdiction in the case as long as the Cherokees were seen, and could act, as an independent nation. Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that "the relationship of the tribes to the United States resembles that of a 'ward to its guardian'."<sup>114</sup> Ross knew that negotiations with President Jackson would not bear fruit, so he focused on Congress, writing a memorial. Ross found a few sympathizers, especially among the missionaries of the American Board. They published a pamphlet condemning Removal, which was widely read. The American Board organized large anti-Removal protests which were highly successful, leading to national petition in support of the Indians. Soon petitions came from college campuses, women's groups, and town meetings.<sup>115</sup> The most biting comments, however, were reserved for Georgian politicians, condemning their discriminatory Cherokee measures.

The President and his followers were disturbed by this fierce opposition. Democrats in Congress blamed the missionaries and their supporters for these activities. Jackson thought that the missionaries' battle against Removal was caused by their fear of losing federal funding. He ordered the Secretary of War to confiscate all the funds that belonged to the American Board. Congressional debate on the matter began in April 1830. Supporters of Jackson argued that this policy was a humanitarian solution because it would save the

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<sup>113</sup> Magliocca, "The Cherokee Removal and The Fourteenth Amendment," 888.

<sup>114</sup> C. Wilkinson, *American Indians, Time, and the Law: Native Societies in a Modern Constitutional Democracy* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>115</sup> Magliocca, "The Cherokee Removal and The Fourteenth Amendment," 890.

Cherokees from the onslaught of white settlers. Opponents stated that this removal would be just the first of many measures that Indians would have to endure. The leader of the opposition, Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen, asserted that there was nothing humanitarian about the Removal at all: if the Cherokees refused to move from their ancestral lands, then they would have to submit to the Georgia's legislature, which would treat them as second-class people.<sup>116</sup> The opposition also questioned the legality of Jackson's effort to governing the tribes. For instance, the opposition claimed that Georgia had no right to pass laws upon the Cherokees because that power was reserved to Congress. Supporters of Removal responded that state regulation of the Tribes could not be unconstitutional, because it also had happened to tribes in the North. The Democrats also asserted that the Cherokees did not have any rights because they were not "equal to the rest of the community." One Democrat explained that the policy of acculturation proved that the Cherokees were less than human because its goal was to reform "their barbarous laws and customs."<sup>117</sup>

Despite the debate, the bill was approved with a significant margin of just one vote. When Ross and the Cherokee delegation saw that the negotiations with Congress had failed, they went to the U.S. courts. In court, the state of Georgia did everything in its power to bring evidence that the Cherokee Nation could not only not sue, but also not be seen as a "foreign" nation, because the Cherokees did not have a constitution or a strong central government. This was entirely inaccurate, because the Cherokee Nation had established a constitution in 1827, and the Cherokee Nation could prove this.<sup>118</sup> The Court, however, determined that the Founding Fathers did not really consider the Indian Tribes as foreign nations but more as domestic nations, and consequently the Cherokee Nation lacked the standing to sue as a "foreign" nation.<sup>119</sup> So, the court ruling resulted in removal of the Cherokee nation from its ancestral lands, according to the new Removal Policy of Andrew Jackson in 1830.

## Removal

Despite the Court's ruling that the Cherokee Nation had to leave its tribal lands during the *Cherokee Nation vs. Georgia case*, the Cherokee Nation refused to leave. It was supported by many Americans and most of the missionaries. This is proof that, as Michael Coleman

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<sup>116</sup> Ibidem, 892.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>118</sup> *The Cherokee Constitution of 1827*, Document A. <http://www.teachushistory.org/files/indianremoval/Indian-Removal-Documents.pdf>

<sup>119</sup> R.CONLEY, *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 18-19.

once argued, missionaries as a whole were never racists.<sup>120</sup> Missionaries like Evan Jones, Daniel Butrick, and Samuel Worchester came to see in 1828 that Andrew Jackson's new Indian policy would not help the Indians but harm them. And when that happened, they openly criticized their own government for its injustices. One of the major reasons that many of the frontier men voted for Jackson in 1828 was that he was determined to put an end to George Washington's original Indian policy of civilization and assimilation, and introduced the policy of removal.<sup>121</sup> The missionaries Samuel Worcester and Elizur Butler were arrested by the state of Georgia because of their opposition to Cherokee removal. Worcester several times refused to be set free on the condition that he would leave the Cherokee Nation. Worcester, who lived as a postmaster in New Echota, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, saw this as treason to the tribe and stayed in prison for four years.<sup>122</sup> The Cherokees, however, could only conclude that Christians were not sincere. The Indians who had lived in the south-east had made more progress in acculturation than any other Indian tribe. In 1832, most of them were independent farmers who lived in their own logs and dressed and behaved pretty much like white farmers. It was said by a commissioner of Indian Affairs that "The Cherokees show a great deal of improvement and are still improving and bid fair at no distant date to rival their white brethren of the west in point of wealth, civilization and moral and intellectual improvement... The greater part of the Cherokees are farmers, have good comfortable homes and live, many of them, as well and as genteel and in a pecuniary point of view will compare with the better class of farmers in the states"<sup>123</sup> But instead of being admitted as equal citizens, they were forcedly removed from their tribal lands. Many Indians blamed Christianity for it. One Cherokee chief reportedly said that all those who oppressed the Cherokees were Christians. "The government of the United States is a Christian government and is upheld by Christians. All alike. The government does it and the people uphold the government. All Christians."<sup>124</sup>

Because the Cherokees refused to follow the Removal policy, the government agents who dealt with the Cherokees were told to try to kindly persuade the Cherokees to remove. Thomas L. McKenney, head of Bureau of Indian Affairs, had sent Hugh Montgomery, a Cherokee Agent, on June 9, 1830 to encourage the Cherokee to move to the west. He said: "...

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<sup>120</sup> M. Coleman, "Not Race but Grace," in: *Journal of American History*, 67, June 1980, 41-60.

<sup>121</sup> McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870*, 44.

<sup>122</sup> The *Worchester vs Georgia* case is far too complex to describe in detail. So I suggest for further reading : Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier*, Ronald Berutti, "The Cherokee Cases: The Fight to Save the Supreme Court and the Cherokee Indians," in: *American Indian Law Review*, 17 (1992), 291-308.

<sup>123</sup> G. Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 358.

<sup>124</sup> McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870*, 44.

Speak to them as their friend. Use no threats; exercise no unkindness. If they stay, it will be of their own free will also. There will be employed no force any way, but the force of reason, and parental counsel, unless it shall be to protect them in removing."<sup>125</sup> Even President Jackson tried to persuade the Cherokees. In his famous letter to the Cherokees he wrote:

Your condition must become worse and worse, and you will ultimately disappear, as so many tribes have done before you.... I tell you that you cannot remain where you now are... You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the west and join your countrymen, who are already established there. And the sooner you do this, the sooner you can commence your career of improvement and prosperity... The United States have assigned to you a fertile and extensive country, with a very fine climate adapted to your habits, and with all the other natural advantages which you ought to desire or expect... Look at the condition of the Creeks... their young men are committing depredations upon the property of our citizens, and are shedding their blood. This cannot and will not be allowed. Punishment will follow.<sup>126</sup>

Whether this letter and the kind treatment of Cherokee agents helped, cannot be proven. But in December 1835, the Cherokee Nation was betrayed by a small group of Cherokee chiefs who made a treaty, the Treaty of New Echota, with Jackson's commissioner John Schermerhorn. The reason why these chiefs did this is unknown. What is known, however, is that the Secretary of War continuously interfered with the tribe's affairs. This way the Federal Government could prevent the creation of a Cherokee government chosen by a majority of the people, a government which it would have troubles manipulating.<sup>127</sup> The option that these chiefs were bribed cannot be ruled out: bribes were not uncommon in the Cherokee Nation. Many Cherokees had accepted a bribe and immediately left for the West. Another possible option is that they supported the white cause. Most of the Cherokee chiefs were mixed-bloods. On the other hand, however, the threat of extensive force by the Americans can also not be ruled out. After the signing of the treaty, major Ridge, a Cherokee chief, was quoted: "I have signed my death warrant."<sup>128</sup> Such a remark does not sound like a

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<sup>125</sup> [http://historyproject.ucdavis.edu/lessons/view\\_lesson.php?id=22](http://historyproject.ucdavis.edu/lessons/view_lesson.php?id=22) .

<sup>126</sup> A. Jackson, 'Letter to the Cherokee Tribe,' March 16, 1835.

<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/Letter%20to%20Cherokee.pdf>

<sup>127</sup> U.S House Document No. 129, Twenty-sixth Congress, First session. <https://bulk.resource.org/gao.gov/67-13/00001940.pdf>

<sup>128</sup> B. Hicks, *Toward the Setting Sun: John Ross, the Cherokees, and the Trail of Tears* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011), 282.

voluntary act. And let's not forget that the chiefs had a great responsibility. The government officials were quite blunt: "remove or perish."

This treaty was not only a betrayal of the Cherokee Nation, but also fraudulent according to Cherokee law because it was never ratified by the Cherokee council. Therefore, the Cherokees still refused to leave their lands. On May 24, 1838, the Cherokee people came under the military rule of the US army. The Secretary of War considered them to be in defiance of the American law by continuing to live on land that now belonged to the citizens of Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and North Carolina.

### **The Trail of Tears**

From May, 1838 to July 1 that same year, General Winfield Scott's soldiers rounded up sixteen thousand Cherokees (two thousand Cherokees came voluntarily to Arkansas in the early nineteenth century and between 1836 and 1838 they moved to their permanent domain in present-day Oklahoma). The Cherokees were driven from their homes to three forts, from which they were to be moved by steamboats to their new lands. The Cherokees were not allowed to take household goods with them. The only thing they could take with them were the clothes they were wearing.

The first detachments of Cherokee men, woman, and children shipped on June 6. Another detachment of one thousand Cherokees travelled over land for eight hundred miles under military guard. The thirteen thousand Cherokees in the camps pleaded not to be forced to move to their new land until autumn. Because of the drought in the summer, there was a fear of epidemics (as a result of bad drinking water); the rivers were so low that boats occasionally had to stop for weeks, waiting for the water level to rise. The Cherokee sent a petition to General Scott asking him to allow the remaining Cherokees to wait until September. Scott acceded to this request on June 19. But soon the Cherokees discovered that the overcrowded forts were totally inadequate to house thousands of Cherokees through the long hot summer. The army had given little thought on the construction of these camps because the officials expected the Cherokees to inhabit the forts for only a few weeks. So there were not enough shelters, water and sanitary facilities. Within a month, all of the camps were swept by epidemics that cost hundreds of Cherokees their lives. Although the soldiers tried to hire white doctors, many of the Cherokees preferred their own medicine men and believed that white doctors brought death with them. Estimates vary on the total number of people who died, but it is generally believed that two thousand to twenty-five hundred died in the camps. These epidemics also caused the deportation to be suspended until winter, which

meant that when they were removed, the Cherokees would have to travel through snow and ice. Officials decided it was better to send the remaining Cherokees by an overland route than by boat. On the assumption that the journey would be about eight hundred miles, and that the Indians travelled an average of ten miles per day, the trip could be completed in eighty days. The remaining Cherokees were divided into thirteen contingents.

Unfortunately, there is no account of the number of Cherokees who died as a result of this removal. The government probably did not want to preserve any information about the tragic happening, or was just not interested in that phase of the Removal. From the fragmented information that we have it appeared that more than 1,600 of those who were removed with John Ross alone died on their journey to their new homeland.<sup>129</sup> But on the basis of available data, we can surmise that probably over 4,000 Cherokees died during the Removal.<sup>130</sup> A soldier who was present later said, "I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee Removal was the cruellest work I ever knew."<sup>131</sup> Another private, John Burnett, also spoke about the Trail of Tears:

(I) witnessed the execution of the most brutal order in the History of American Warfare. I saw the helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, and driven at the bayonet point... I saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into six hundred and forty-five wagons and started toward the west. One can never forget the sadness and solemnity of that morning... Many of these helpless people did not have blankets and many of them had been driven from home barefooted. The long painful journey to the west ended March 26th, 1839, with four-thousand silent graves reaching from the foothills of the Smoky Mountains to what is known as Indian territory in the West. And covetousness on the part of the white race was the cause of all that the Cherokees had to suffer....Chief Junaluska was personally acquainted with President Andrew Jackson...Chief John Ross sent Junaluska as an envoy to plead with President Jackson for protection for his people, but Jackson's manner was cold and indifferent toward the rugged son of the forest who had saved his life... The doom of the Cherokee was sealed. Washington, D.C., had decreed that they must be driven West and their lands given to the white man ... However, murder is murder whether committed by the

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<sup>129</sup> G. Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 281.

<sup>130</sup> J. Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, Nineteenth annual report, Bureau of American Ethnology.  
[http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/meta/html/guan/rbko/meta\\_guan\\_rbko\\_773.html?Welcome](http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/meta/html/guan/rbko/meta_guan_rbko_773.html?Welcome)

<sup>131</sup> G. Foreman, *Indian Removal: The emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), 287.



villain skulking in the dark or by uniformed men stepping to the strains of martial music.<sup>132</sup>

The Trail of Tears ended when the last of the thirteen contingents reached its new home in March of 1839. The Cherokees were in desperate condition. The Federal Government had promised to provide rations for the Cherokees to live on until they could grow their first crop, but the private contractors provided them with rotten food. And white entrepreneurs brought barrels of whisky into the Cherokee nation to wring from the Cherokees their last dollars. Many Cherokees became alcoholics.<sup>133</sup>

After the Removal, the Cherokees were confronted with several problems. First of all, they had to adjust to the new land, which meant they had to adapt to a new climate and a new environment. Furthermore, they had to establish friendly relations with the indigenous tribes living in Oklahoma and summoned by the Federal government to make room for the Cherokees. The Cherokees must have arrived in their new homeland with mixed emotions. The treaties they made with the whites were all violated. Removal from their ancient homeland created a political shock to the Cherokees, but an even more profound spiritual one. Cherokee religion was closely tied to the land, with its sacred places, its flora and fauna: the Cherokees cherished their link with the harmony of nature. It was very difficult to recreate this spiritual world in a new environment which was totally new to them. Although a few Cherokees had turned to Christianity before the removal, this was not enough to protect them against these shocks. Several missionaries left the Cherokees after 1832; moreover, the traditional religion lost part of its relevance. The shaman might still be useful for medicinal help, but the traditional religious philosophy was mostly gone. The familial and tribal ties, strengthening the cooperative values of their culture and so important for survival, were replaced by political concerns and private enterprises by those in a leadership role. The Cherokee Nation faced an epidemic of diseases from 1838 to 1846, causing many deaths. Infants and children were especially vulnerable to the diseases, and many missionaries at the time mentioned stories of grieving mothers who became a Christian because Christians would be reunited with their dead children in Heaven. The stories have a certain truth value: after 1839 two-third of the converted Cherokees were full-blood women.<sup>134</sup>

A new sense of Cherokee identity evolved between 1839 and 1855; it provided the basis for a major political revolt of the full-bloods against the Cherokees of mixed ancestry. The

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<sup>132</sup> John Burnett, *Story of the Trail of Tears*, 1890. <http://www.powersource.com/cherokee/burnett.html>

<sup>133</sup> Till this day it can be said that alcohol is the bane of the Indians and many of them have alcohol problems.

<sup>134</sup> McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870*, 209.

key elements of this identity were a combination of Christianity and a new tolerance for traditional dances, sports, and ceremonies among Cherokee Christians. Eventually, the Cherokee Christians combined Cherokee and Christian values and traditions. The great weakness in evangelical theology from the Indians point of view was that Christianity focussed more upon individual life than tribal well-being.<sup>135</sup> Although no more than 12 to 15 percent of the Cherokees were official members of Christian churches by 1860, it is actually not that strange that several Cherokees were easy targets for conversion. Those who converted to Christianity wished to avoid total assimilation into white culture. To these Cherokees, Christianity was a religion that any other nation or people might hold and that allowed them at the same time to assert their own historical and ethnic identity.

Not all members of the Cherokee Nation adopted white lifestyles and successfully assimilated. Robert Berkhofer shows that only the English-speaking Cherokees eagerly adopted white civilization, owned most of the slaves, and dominated the government and the school system. Because, like their white neighbors, the Cherokees had adopted farming, they also adopted black slave labor. Holding slaves was not something new in Native American society. Many south-eastern tribes took captives from rival tribes and used them as slaves. The more traditional Cherokees, however, resisted white innovations and opposed changes in the government. Especially full bloods resisted the Christian conversion efforts. This resistance became stronger after 1828, when the frontier whites supported Jackson's policy of Removal to the West and rejected the policy of assimilation.

Although the Cherokee Nation as a whole never completely assimilated, the Cherokees were nevertheless regarded as the most civilized tribe. According to Grant Foreman, many Cherokees were so able and keen to adopt the white lifestyle because of the missionaries' influence. Foreman thinks that the missionaries gave the Cherokees morale, hope, and a certain determination to live on.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, Foreman sees the Removal as a turning point, because it gave the Indians courage and opportunity to improve their conditions.<sup>137</sup> But this analysis is not entirely accurate because even before the Removal the Cherokees faced white aggression and several Cherokee chiefs were looking for methods to empower their people and prepare them for self-defence in the (coming) confrontations with whites. With the aid of the missionaries they were able to imitate the white man. Once they obtained literacy skills, they had a tool to fight for their rights. On the other hand, this

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<sup>135</sup> Ibidem, 111.

<sup>136</sup> G. Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 422.

<sup>137</sup> Ibidem.

resistance caused whites and the federal government to behave increasingly aggressively. According to Foreman, the seed of education survived removal. Foreman, however, forgets two important elements. First of all, the missionaries succeeded in converting only twelve percent of the Cherokee nation: this can hardly be called a success. (If we compare this percentage to other tribes, the Cherokees hold the largest percentage of converted Indians, though.) The reason seems clear: Christianity offered consolation for their suffering during the Trail of Tears. Furthermore, Cherokees also feared death and “baptized” their members. Christianity answered that fear, offering solace in its references to the afterlife in Heaven. And we must not forget that the Cherokees were more than any other tribe “infiltrated” by white people who married Cherokee women and because of this marriage became members of the nation. Because these white people were relatively educated and had knowledge about issues such as leadership, most of them became chiefs or had other important roles in the tribes’ political system. Next to their eagerness to preserve harmony in the Nation, this element explains why the Cherokees assimilated “easily.”

## Conclusion

*Though much is taken, much abides, and  
though we are not now that strength which  
in old days moved earth and heaven, that  
which we are, we are...*

-Lord Alfred Tennyson-  
*Ulysses*

The cultural assimilation of Indian tribes was not the result of choice, but was imposed on them with the help of draconian measures. They were forced by federal land allotment, governmental intervention in tribal affairs, and conversion to Christianity. Assimilation involved a clear assault on their religions and cultures, a denial of the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. The Indian children were forcibly sent to boarding schools to inculcate white values. A quote by Indian Commissioner Thomas J. Morgan shows as much: “They should be taught to look upon America as their home and the government as their friend. They should hear little or nothing of the wrongs [done] the Indians and of the injustice of the white race.”<sup>138</sup>

History is full of similar crimes. Christian crusaders slaughtered people in the Middle East; white settlers killed thousands of aboriginals in Australia. The Turks committed genocide against the Armenians between 1915 and 1918 and Stalin exterminated ten million peasants. The formula is simple and always the same: dehumanize the other group, make it the embodiment of evil so that the other group is transformed into something less than human. This dehumanizing of the Indians led to a removal policy that destroyed their native cultures and decreased their population.

Although such tragedies were meant to encourage Indians to assimilate into the American society, the assimilation of the Indian tribes was only relatively successful. Even the Cherokee tribe, which was referred to as the most civilized tribe in America, did not fully assimilate. Despite the tragedies they endured, not every tribe member was keen to become an American. The Cherokee removal entailed an enormous population loss and changed the whole tribal organization, which led to political divisions in the tribe. Nevertheless, most of

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<sup>138</sup> R. Carpenter, *American Indian History Day by Day: A Reference Guide to Events* (Portsmouth: Greenwood Publishing, 2012), 384.

the Cherokees did re-establish their tribal life. In Indian Territory, the Cherokees established a new capital called *Tahlequah* and created a new tribal constitution; they were known as the Cherokee Nation. Yet at the same time especially these Cherokees were the ones who would adopt a white lifestyle. The reasons why Cherokees assimilated relatively easily were numerous. Their religion resembled to a certain extent Christianity. The Cherokees were already agriculturalists. The Cherokees were in a way hesitant to resist, usually following their leaders; they did not want to destroy tribal harmony and thereby neglect the will of the Great Spirit. Moreover, more than other tribes, the Cherokees had quite a few mixed-bloods among them. More than others, these mixed-blood Indians sympathized with the US government. Because most full-blood Cherokees went to the Southeast, they lost their tribal influence and became isolated. With the suffering of the Trail of Tears and the increasing interracial marriages, the Cherokee Nation eventually was dominated by mixed-blood Indians.<sup>139</sup>

Despite the low percentage of converted Cherokees, the Cherokee tribe was an easy target for cultural genocide. According to James Axtell, the use of the word genocide in relation to the destruction of Indian life entails many problems. Of course the word genocide was used to describe the slaughtering of the Jews by the Nazis during World War II; the word is used to classify a mass killing. Axtell believes that this word cannot be applied to what happened to the Native Americans during the Colonial era. Axtell argues in his book *Beyond 1492* that no European government aimed to exterminate all of the Indians as a race and that the deliberate attempts to destroy a tribe can be counted on the fingers of one hand.<sup>140</sup> Axtell sees the attempts to classify American Indian history as genocide as totally inappropriate.<sup>141</sup> He says that in general Americans are not guilty of murdering Indian women and babies. Though obviously right in this last assumption, Axtell uses the word genocide only to refer to the slaughter of a population, and not to the destruction of its identity, culture and religion. The cultural extermination of innocent people was hardly a historical coincidence, however, for which Americans bare no responsibility. To this day, American textbooks fail to describe Native American culture and history correctly. Many textbooks say that the concept of ownership or private property was totally unknown by the Indians.<sup>142</sup> This is inaccurate: only the tribes on the Plains and in the woodland owned land communally, and tribe members only

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<sup>139</sup> W. McLoughlin, W. Conser, "The Cherokees in Transition: A Statistical Analysis of the Federal Cherokee Census of 1835," in: *The Journal of American History*, nr 64, 679.

<sup>140</sup> Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 261.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*, 262.

<sup>142</sup> T. Bailey, *The American Pageant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference Publishers, 1983), 5.

owned the products they made. But in most tribes, house sites and hunting territories were given to families by the tribal leaders and then were regarded as private property. Other errors in textbooks involve the charge that the Native American government was poorly organized, particularly compared with the Mayas and Aztecs, and that as a result the Indians were doomed: disunity was the logical outcome. But the confederacies of the Creek, Pawhatan, Iroquois and Huron are well-known, and fought against white invaders for over two centuries. Furthermore, the textbooks characterize native religion as primitive and pagan, because Indians believed that everything in nature contained a spirit.<sup>143</sup> But Indians respected the souls only of living things, and not of objects such as rocks.

What can be said is that the Cherokees “contributed” their own part to this genocide. Indian culture is misunderstood by Americans, from Columbus’s arrival up until the twenty-first century. Out of this misunderstanding came cruelty and genocide. By forcing the Cherokees from their lands and undermining their culture, the American government did everything in its power to destroy the Cherokees’ identity, culture and freedom. Fearing disharmony, the Cherokee Nation did nothing to prevent this from happening. To make matters worse, the trauma of the Removal paved the way for many Cherokees to embrace the salvation that Christianity claimed to provide.

But maybe we must consider the fact that the large-scale assimilation endeavor failed as a sign of Native American success. Apparently most Indian tribes loved their own lifestyle and freedom more than the work ethic and obligations of white society. Furthermore, they had a higher opinion about their own religion than Christianity. And the Indians loved their freedom more than life, and were fully aware that in the American economy they would become slaves of the system. To demand that Indians who lived in freedom cherishing their culture and religion for hundreds of years would change overnight was absurd.

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<sup>143</sup> J. Henretta, *America’s History* (Chicago: Chicago Dorsey Press, 1987), 44.

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