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THE UNITED STATES 'CIVIL' WAR: THE FORGOTTEN NATION OF CHEROKEE
PEOPLE AND THEIR DYNAMIC WARTIME EXPERIENCE

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THE UNITED STATES 'CIVIL' WAR: THE FORGOTTEN NATION OF CHEROKEE PEOPLE AND THEIR DYNAMIC WARTIME EXPERIENCE

The selected narrative of the United States Civil War changes drastically depending on the region in which it is told, but while the story itself may emphasize different heroes or villains, the players are always the same: the Union, the Confederacy, the slaves, and the freedmen. This popular narrative has slowly excluded the Native American nations¹ tied to the bloodshed, or in the very least, has minimized them to blurbs in the corners of textbooks. The reexamination of their intricate involvement prove worthwhile, as it provides virtually uncharted insight into the Civil War.

Amongst these forgotten combatants, the Cherokee Nation played a role in the conflict, and was immensely affected by the war itself. Similar to the conflict between the Union and the Confederacy, the roots of the struggle for the Cherokee Nation began long before the battles broke out. While hardships for the Cherokee Nation involving the Federal Government can be traced back to the eighteenth century, perhaps the most influential offense was the Trail of Tears. Beginning in 1830 with the Indian Removal Act, the massacre and relocation of the Cherokee

¹ There were a multitude of Native American nations that fought on either side of the United States Civil War, though the four most widely recognized nations are: Cherokee, Choctaw, Seminole, and Catawba. For more information on the divergent Native American nations in the United States Civil War, see: Hauptman, Laurence M. *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996).

Nation heightened the Federal Government's precedent of racism, betrayal, and mistreatment of indigenous peoples. The Indian Removal Act was passed despite both the Cherokee Nation's aid to President Andrew Jackson in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend² and the Supreme Court upholding of Cherokee sovereignty in 1831.³ The inherent disregard of Cherokee human rights and national sovereignty pushed relations with the United States government to an all time low, and greatly influenced many Cherokee opinions on the American Civil War.

In addition to the strain it placed on the relationship between the Cherokee Nation and the Federal Government, the Trail of Tears took a heavy physical and emotional toll on the Cherokee people that influenced decisions and alliances well into the Civil War. Approximately 17,000 members of the Cherokee tribe were forced to leave their homes for "Indian Territory" in now present-day Oklahoma, and along the way as many as 4,000 died from illness and other afflictions. Wronged by the United States and scarred by the massacre, the Cherokee Nation began the decades leading up to the war in a period of instability.

The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal Act began the immense internal struggle of the Cherokee, but it was perpetuated by a number of other cultural factors. The relocation of the

² The Battle of Horseshoe Bend occurred on March 27, 1814 between the Creek tribe and the United States of America over Native American autonomy. Joined by approximately 600 Native Americans, including Cherokee and Creek warriors, Andrew Jackson's victory granted him public favor in the United States. For more information, see, "The Battle of Horseshoe Bend: Collision of Cultures." National Parks Service.

³ The Supreme Court Case *Worcester v. Georgia* and *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* are seen as an important precedents in the history of the Cherokee Nation in establishing independence. After the denial of the federal injunction in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, the Supreme Court of 1831 upheld the Cherokee Nation's status as a dependent nation. The next year, in *Worcester v. Georgia*, the Cherokee Nation's status was lifted to a sovereign nation, deeming the later Trail of Tears unconstitutional and illegal. For further reading, see "Cherokee Nation v. Georgia." LII / Legal Information Institute and "Worcester v. Georgia." LII / Legal Information Institute.

Cherokee tribe brought the challenge of internal conflict to the nation, to the extent that the tribe bordered on its own civil war. The intratribal division extended far beyond the simple choice of Union or Confederate -- the deeply rooted ideological rifts exposed by the war and relocation manifested animosity that would last for decades. Directly after the relocation, signs of the divide caused by the forced close quarters arose, and were amplified by the hardships of the time. The members of the Cherokee tribe who were relocated lived with members who had moved west long ago, and the differences were concrete: "The new Indian arrivals... squabbled with the Old Settlers, the Cherokee who had traveled west between 1818 and 1828."⁴ After a decade of debate and internal conflict, the Cherokee of Oklahoma became the Cherokee Nation in 1846, but even with resolution, they were still set apart from the Eastern Cherokee Tribe of Tennessee. Moving into the war, the political state of the Cherokee Nation was relatively sound, but the history of dispute and hardship put the nation in a delicate position.

Not only did the political situation of the Cherokee Nation begin to influence the wartime dynamic, but the cultural situation did as well. A careful examination of relevant Cherokee culture is required to fully comprehend the tumultuous and influential nature of the pre-war atmosphere. The alteration of gender roles, for example, provides crucial insight as to the depth of the change in the decades before the conflict. Before the war, the Cherokee Nation maintained relatively more progressive gender roles than the United States did. Women were figures of authority in agriculture, thanks in part to the legend of the first man and woman, while men took charge of hunting. Moreover, women in the Cherokee Nation had certain specific political powers that were organized through the categories of "War Women" and "Beloved

⁴ Burgan, Michael. *The Trail of Tears* (Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2001), 26

Women.” War women were able to decide the fates of war prisoners, while Beloved Women had the respect of the nation and could voice influential opinions.⁵ Aside from political power, the Cherokee society was matrilineal and matrilineal, which was a radically different gender structure from other western societies like the United States. Women in pre-war Cherokee society were in many ways more powerful than women in the United States at the time, and the war contributed to the momentum of equality. “The crisis of the Civil War empowered women in the Cherokee Nation because they had to assume new responsibilities...”⁶ However, despite this increase in responsibility, the equalization of gender roles was a concept as ambiguous as race was during the war. “At the same time, the Civil War reinforced older Cherokee gender roles... by emphasizing the role of men as warriors.”⁷ Combat served to reinforce the concept of violence and power as a masculine trait, moving the Cherokee nation away from equality. In terms of gender, this heightened demand for masculinity before the war was ultimately a regression and step towards assimilation of American culture.

Another significant part of Cherokee culture that tied the nation to the Civil War was slavery. The institution of slavery in the Cherokee nation differed in some ways from that of slavery in the United States, but the basis was the same: racism, specifically against African

⁵ These two groups of women were purely political and remained influential until the late 19th century. Though instrumental to women's' roles in Cherokee politics, they focused mainly on native american removal crises. For more information, see Miles, Tiya. "Circular Reasoning: Recentring Cherokee Women in the Antiremoval Campaign." *American Quarterly* 61, (June 2009), p 224 Accessed February 25, 2018.

⁶ Johnston, Carolyn. *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 83.

⁷ *Ibid*, 81

Americans. Fiercely traditional values of race, defined by blood, were upheld by the Cherokee Nation in the decades leading up to the war. In the 1840s and 50s, the passage of laws forbidding interracial marriage, literacy, and paid labor for African Americans demonstrated that the Cherokee concept of lineage and race “has fallen prey to the prevalent racial ideologies of nineteenth-century Euroamericans, who held that race was an inherent biological factor.”⁸ This connection that slavery forged between the Cherokee nation and the South influenced the division between Cherokee political leanings in the Civil War.

The Cherokee Nation’s opposing opinions on slavery were ultimately more influential to the course of the war than the actual institution of the slavery. After relocation, the Cherokee Nation struggled with division, but the topic of race was by far the most controversial issue. The strongest indicator as to the extent of this duality is the formation of two separate secret societies. The Keetoowah Nighthawk Society and the Knights of the Golden Circle were essentially opposites of one another, basing themselves on different opinions of slavery and racial equality. Knights of the Golden Circle made being pro-slavery a membership requirement and focused on expanding the Anglo-American lifestyle, widely favoring assimilation and cooperation with other slave holding entities, like the South. On the other hand, the Keetoowah Nighthawk Society fought for racial equality and embraced Cherokee traditionalism. Such was the standing of the two societies that prominent Confederate Cherokee leader Stand Watie was a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle, and Chief John Ross frequently associated himself with the Keetoowah Nighthawk Society.

⁸ Sturm, Circe. *Blood politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 53

As the nation inched towards the brink of war, the two societies began to tie their Cherokee issues to those of the United States, and parallels were drawn to the Union and Confederacy. The clash between the societies was often an issue that the Cherokee Nation at large debated. “[The Keetoowah Nighthawk Society’s] ideology put them at odds with the Knights of the Golden Circle and led to political clashes when each side tried to dictate how the Cherokee Nation would be run.”⁹ The two societies embodied the racial and cultural turmoil of the Cherokee Nation during the Civil War.

This new onslaught of internal challenges surrounding race, politics, and gender became increasingly connected to and exasperated by alliances in the war. The Cherokee for the most part favored the Confederacy, but a significant and outspoken minority preferred the Union or pacifism. While relations with the American Federal Government were strained, a number of Cherokee people had ideological issues with the Confederacy, or simply wanted to remain neutral in the best interest of the nation. Seeing themselves as a sovereign entity, many agreed with Chief John Ross when he highlighted the negative consequences of getting involved:

There is no reason why we should split up and become involved in internal strife and violence on account of the political condition of the States. We should really have nothing to do with them but remain quiet and observe those relations of peace and friendship towards all the people of the States imposed by our treaties. By this means alone we can avoid all cause for hostility from either section of the country and upon this policy we ought all to be able to attend our ordinary affairs and avoid all causes of strife amongst ourselves.¹⁰

⁹ Minges, Patrick. *Slavery in the Cherokee Nation: The Keetoowah Society and The Defining of a People, 1855-1867* (London: Routledge, 2003), 2

¹⁰ *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003) p. 81

Chief John Ross was an influential figure in the Cherokee Nation, and his push for neutrality was not taken lightly by neither the Confederates nor the Union. A number of Confederate emissaries were sent to gain Ross's allegiance, though his firm decision was not easily swayed.

To convince Chief John Ross that the Cherokee Nation should abandon neutrality, the Confederacy used a mixture of threats and bribes or appeasements. The main emissary and connection between the two parties was Albert Pike who was the Confederate Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Pike first began his attempts to sway Ross by threatening to appeal to Cherokee dissenters, which would destabilize Ross's position as chief. However, despite the threat, in no way did Pike underestimate Ross -- in fact, he thought the chief "shrewd."¹¹ Comprehending the power of his potential adversary, Pike's threats were short-lived. As negotiations progressed, Pike offered a number of things to the Cherokee Nation that made an alliance difficult for Ross to resist, including: Confederate protection, a special Confederate court and delegate seat in the House of Representatives, indefinite ownership of current lands and 500,000 reimbursement for any lost Neutral Lands, and assumption of annuity payments. Ultimately, these terms provide evidence that the Confederacy's emissaries and Pike worked to provide the long-denied deference (or the veneer of it) to Cherokee Nation.

¹¹ Moulton, Gary. "Chief John Ross During the Civil War," *Civil War History*, 19 (December 1973), 316.

As a result of the backlash, mounting pressure, and immense incentives¹² provided by the Confederacy, Chief John Ross was unable to resist a war so close to home. By siding with the Confederacy, Ross eased some of the worries of the South about Native American territory, but more importantly, he secured possible advantages for the Cherokee Nation, his first priority. “Above all it should be remembered that Ross's first loyalty was to the Cherokees. All other considerations, whether Union or Confederate, was secondary to his regard for his Nation.”¹³ This ideology was a common point for the Cherokee people in a time of instability and duality. The Cherokees may have been faced with a decision of alliances during the war, but the nation’s allegiance was first and foremost to itself.

Union supporters and pacifists were widely the minority, and their influence dwindled even further after the cause was abandoned by Chief John Ross. The majority of the Cherokee Nation widely favored the Confederacy for a number of reasons. At the time of the war, there were approximately 21,000 members of the Cherokee Nation, and by the time the war ended, around 3,000 had served as soldiers in the Confederate army. In light of the numerous wrongs committed by the Federal Government against the Cherokee Nation, a large number of the Cherokee people held a certain disdain for the Union, and could not bring themselves to support it. Moreover, the Cherokee Nation’s location in the South combined with the fierce push towards Native American assimilation at the time made the two allegedly sovereign entities more

¹² The Confederacy and Pike additionally promised to the Cherokee increased sovereignty and financial compensation that they had been demanding for years, to no avail, from the Federal Government. The treaty that outlined these incentives, however, was loosely abided by and for the most part disregarded by the Confederate government as the war progressed. For more information, see Moulton, Gary. "Chief John Ross During the Civil War," *Civil War History* 19, (1973).

¹³ *Ibid*, 318.

amicable than ever. With the impending threat of potential Confederate invasion and the example of other native American tribes signing treaties with the rebels, political pressure mounted.¹⁴

Political ties and opinions were not the only push in favor of the Confederacy, however, as the dawn of war only seem to reinforce shared racial attitudes between the Cherokee Nation and the South:

The Nation...chose to uphold and strengthen older racial divisions in the Cherokee society and create a hierarchy of legal citizenship. The Cherokees fought against admitting former slaves into Cherokee citizenship and did so only at the insistence of federal authorities. Once the Cherokees capitulated to American demands to extend citizenship to freed people, the Cherokee legislation resolved to keep freed people separate from other citizens of the Nation.¹⁵

This reinforcement of slavery strengthened the ties between the Cherokee people and the Confederacy, and served to deepen the internal divide amongst the Cherokee people. The combination of this attitude, political incentives, and the push for assimilation was enough for a number of Cherokee people to take up arms and fight the Confederate's two front battle.¹⁶

For the most part, the Cherokee participation in the Civil War was on the Confederate side, and was fought simultaneously in divergent theaters: the Trans-Mississippi Theater and the Western Theater. The war in the Trans-Mississippi Theater was led by Stand Watie, while

¹⁴ The tribes that had early signed treaties with the Confederacy by March 1861 were the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. For more information, see Myles, Shingoose. *The Civil War Within the Civil War: The Cherokee Nation and the Third Indian Home Guard in the United States Civil War*, Master's Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, (2017), 27

¹⁵ *Race and the Cherokee Nation Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 74.

¹⁶ In general, the Cherokee people granted slaves more civil and legal liberties than Southern slaves were granted. For more information, see Minges, 3

William Holland Thomas led forces in the Western Theater -- the territory that the Native Americans were forced to relocate to. Amongst the two, the Trans-Mississippi Theater is perhaps more historically significant, as it hosted more battles and had more soldiers¹⁷ than the Western Theater, increasing its impact on the war at large.

A complete comprehension of Confederate Cherokees in the war requires an examination of the Cherokee Confederate leader, Stand Watie. During and before the war, Watie was highly involved in intratribal and external conflict. As a “mixed blood”¹⁸ Cherokee, and a member of the Treaty Party¹⁹ and the Knights of the Golden Circle, Stand Watie fit the profile of Confederate Cherokees well. In fact, Watie embodied the spirit of Confederate Cherokees so completely that it led to a number of rifts involving Chief John Ross, who was essentially his ideological opposite. Feuds were frequent between the two leaders, and rose to violence occasionally. In 1863, it escalated to a climax when Stand Watie burned down Rose Cottage, Ross’s house.²⁰ However, despite the intensity of the feud and extreme differences in beliefs, the common goal was the advancement of the Cherokee agenda.

¹⁷ Overall, ten battles were fought in the Trans-Mississippi theater, with a total of 12 Cherokee regiments in all fighting.

¹⁸ As Cherokee culture was further assimilated to the Southern United States, the issue of blood became a major point of division for the Cherokee. “Mixed” versus “full” blooded Cherokee natives were divided socially and politically, between the two societies and later, the sides of the war. “Full” blooded were typically associated with the Keetoowah Nighthawk society and the Union. Such was the prevalence of this notion of blood that it made appearances in Cherokee legislature. For more information, see Sturm, Circe, 56

¹⁹ Chavez, Will. "Stand Watie: Cherokee Leader and Confederate General," *Cherokee Phoenix*, (2008), Accessed February 25, 2018.

²⁰ The Treaty Party was the group of Native American representatives that signed the Treaty of New Echota, which became the legal basis for the Trail of Tears.

The first major battle for the Cherokee Nation and Stand Watie was the Battle of Wilson's Creek in 1861. It was a prominent success for the Confederate Cherokees that established the power of Stand Watie's force, which fought in a number of battles throughout the war. The battle in which Cherokee Confederates influenced the war the most was the Battle of Pea Ridge, seeing as it was the largest battle they participated in. With nearly 800 Cherokee soldiers fighting alongside a number of tribes and Confederate soldiers, the battle was a significant event for the Cherokee Confederates. Moreover, the battle involved about 14,000 men overall, making it a prominent part of Civil War history, though it was an ultimate loss for the Confederacy. Stand Watie's Cherokee Confederate soldiers did not always fight in large-scale battles, however. A number of the skirmishes involving Stand Watie's troops were "guerilla raids within the Cherokee Nation."²¹ During the war, any deviance from traditional methods of warfare was quickly attacked by the public, although Stand Watie remained devoted to the Confederate cause. Demonstrating the loyal nature of the Cherokee Nation's alliance with the Confederacy, Stand Watie was the last Confederate general to surrender on June 23, 1865.²²

While Stand Watie's forces had a larger impact on the war as a whole, the events in the Western Theater were by no means irrelevant to the narrative of the war and the Cherokee people. William Holland Thomas's troops, about 1,125 men known as the 69th regiment, fought in a number of skirmishes -- the most notorious of which being their battle at Cedar Creek on October 19, 1864. Enraged by the death of beloved leader Astoogahtogeh during a battle,

²¹ Clampitt, R. Bradley. *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 2015, 68.

²² Fogelson, Raymond. *Handbook of North American Indians: Southeast*, 4 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 125.

Confederate Cherokee soldiers in the 69th regiment took revenge on Union soldiers by scalping the dead after the fighting was over. While the act increased the infamy of the regiment, it damaged the United States' public image of the Cherokee, and consequently Thomas ordered the scalps be buried with the bodies. Public image of the Cherokee also decreased during the war when another scalping incident occurred at Pea Ridge, where about a dozen of the 800 Cherokee scalped eight Union soldiers. After the battle, Confederate Brigadier General Albert Pike's report only encouraged this negative public image by using animalistic imagery to describe the actions of the Cherokee combatants: "the Indians swarmed around the guns like bees, in great confusion, jabbering and yelling at a furious rate."²³ The Federal Government was similarly displeased to the extent that one general used the scalping incident as an argument for withdrawing financial aid after the war.

While the narrative of the Confederate Cherokees during the war represents the majority of the Cherokee people, it is imperative not to overlook those who still supported the Union. After Chief John Ross declared Confederate allegiance and was jailed, a number of Union supporters still clung to their ideals and were prepared to fight. These dedicated few formed the Indian Home Guard, a company of Creek and Cherokee Soldiers (many of whom belonged to the Keetoowah Nighthawk Society) was formed in 1862. Many of the soldiers had previously been Confederate, and greater still were the numbers of ordinary men forced to adapt to a military life as the Cherokee people with limited options during the war. For the most part, the medley of tribes and soldiers known as the Indian Home Guard had a brief military history. Some factions

²³ "Cherokees at Pea Ridge." Civil War Trust. Accessed February 25, 2018. <https://www.civilwar.org/learn/articles/cherokees-pea-ridge>.

of it, like the Fourth Indian Home Guard, were planned but never realized. Others, like the Second Indian Home Guard, had organizational difficulties due to internal debates and clashes. Others, however, were fairly successful, like the Third Indian Home Guard. Focusing mainly on scouting land, the group killed dozens of hostiles and briefly declared certain lands Federal, though they were representative of the minority native american opinion. However, despite the Indian Home Guard involvement on the Union's behalf, Union and Federal aid was lacking as the Cherokee were left to face the cold aftermath of the war.

As the war came to an end in 1865, the Cherokee Nation was largely excluded from any benefits of the treaties, and was forced into a difficult political situation. The loss of the Confederates meant the inability to validate any agreements of compensation between the Cherokee and the Confederacy. Additionally, the political and geographical rearrangement of the Cherokee Nation became an issue that left the Cherokee in a position more difficult than that of their pre-war situation. With William Holland Thomas in debt, it was left to the Federal Government to keep Cherokee land from creditors, which was accomplished by filing a lawsuit on the Cherokee's behalf. Unfortunately for the Cherokee people, this meant that the Federal Government once more gained ownership of certain parts of Cherokee land. Moreover, the reorganization of Cherokee land brought into question the legal status of the once Confederate Cherokee people, a grey area led the Federal Government to diminish their independence, "The Eastern Band of Cherokees [could]... own property, enter contracts and bring suits to court. But the Federal Government continued to treat the Cherokee as wards of the government."²⁴ The

²⁴ Rozema, Vicki. *Footsteps of the Cherokees: a Guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair 2007), 50.

combination of an epidemic and lacking independence and land resulted in extreme difficulties for the Cherokee people, making their “Reconstruction” period arguably one of the toughest.

The legal and fiscal difficulties were challenging, but for most Cherokee, the hardship Civil War extended beyond the battlefield or the courtroom. Division of opinion and war crimes ravaged families, and civilians faced multitudes of daily struggles. “In 1863 the combination of the American Civil War and intratribal factionalism... disrupted Cherokee family life, leaving one-third of adult women widows and one-fourth of the children orphans.”²⁵ In addition to the death toll, the socio-economic changes brought by the Civil War made life difficult for many, or in the very least, drastically changed the traditional Cherokee way of life. Like many others, disease became a crisis for the Cherokee people, and smallpox in particular took the lives of many after the war. Moreover, the war amplified pre-existing struggles. “[The Cherokee people] faced numerous challenges due to wartime conditions in addition to the normal burdens of... life in a rural area. The uncertainty of supplies... and isolation caused by poor communication were magnified by the conflict.”²⁶

For the Cherokee Nation, the Civil War aftermath also brought a racial identity crisis that took the nation by surprise. In deciding how to handle the issue of race in particular, the Cherokee Nation struggled with conflicting opinions, and ultimately made certain decisions that were detrimental to the future of the nation. Accepting of slavery like most of the South, the Cherokee Nation passed conflicting legislature on the issue. After the war, the nation upheld their strict laws surrounding interracial marriage, while simultaneously granting new freedoms in

²⁵ Johnston, 72.

²⁶ Confer, 109.

trade and literacy. The issue on race was tumultuous at best, but in the end, the Cherokee Nation sided with the rest of the South once more by upholding racist legislature, “Cherokees had little incentive to produce citizens who had ties to people of African descent, a group that had little social, economic, or political power in the United States. The results of the Civil War seemed to confirm Cherokee efforts to pull away from people of African Descent.”²⁷ If anything, the Civil War heightened tensions around race relations for the Cherokee Nation, and left the issue widely unresolved long after the conflict.

In addition to internal problems the Cherokee faced, external problems mounted. Damage to the pre-existing Federal relationship was only one portion of the issue -- American public opinion on the Cherokee Nation took a sharp turn immediately after the war. During and before the war, the conflict contributed to a public opinion of the tribe reshaped the long withstanding dynamic. As the rift between the North and the South grew, the soon-to-be Confederate states grew increasingly welcoming on a surface level of the Cherokee people. Examples of the alleged welcome can be traced through certain documents: The *Atlanta Weekly Intelligencer*, the only Atlanta newspaper to survive the Civil War, printed an issue in 1855 that tacked onto their title “Cherokee Advocate.”²⁸ In 1861, Confederate Commissioner of Indian Affairs David Hubbard wrote a letter to Chief John Ross about the “mutual interests of [their] people.”²⁹ However, after the war, pretenses of amicability were quickly dropped. Public opinion of the Cherokee people

²⁷ Yarbrough, 81.

²⁸ "Georgia Historic Newspapers." The Atlanta Weekly Intelligencer and Cherokee Advocate. (Atlanta and Marietta, Ga.) 1855-18??, August 17, 1855, Image 1 « Georgia Historic Newspapers. Accessed February 19, 2018.

²⁹ "Collection: John Ross Papers." Gilcrease Museum: Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art. Accessed February 19, 2018.

still favored solely assimilation as demonstrated by reaction to events such as the scalping of Confederate soldiers, and the Confederate affiliations to the Knights of the Golden Circle society. The Civil War and negative opinion of Cherokee actions on the battlefield ultimately served to perpetuate the longstanding and damaging notion of American cultural supremacy.

The legacy of the Cherokee Nation in the Civil War is one of strife and duality. The Civil War's semi-permanent impact on the Cherokee Nation has been examined by a fair amount of scholars, but the Cherokee Nation's legacy within the war has largely been overlooked. Internally, the war was a battle between ideas of tradition and assimilation, war and peace, racism and equality. The American Civil War proved to be both a definitive adjustment of the Cherokee national identity and a challenge, forever leaving its mark on the nation's history. By posing questions regarding identity, citizenship, and treatment of other ethnicities, the Civil War asserted itself as an immense hardship. In addition to the significant internal change in the nation, the decades before and after the war demonstrated equally immense external change. Shifts in American and Cherokee legislature and public opinion reflect the fluidity of the nations' relationship, and the indelible connection between the two sovereign entities. The Cherokee experience in the Civil War was a near microcosm of the American experience. This bond is one of many reasons that makes the exclusion of the Cherokee Nation and people from the common narrative of the Civil War is a profound oversight. The level of Cherokee independence has been largely glossed over, though it merits attention from the United States narrative.

These Natives were not merely pawns or victims of white America's actions. Despite strong pressures from outside interest -- local, state, and federal -- and unfair and oppressive treatment meted out to them, American Indians often managed to maintain their sovereignty and retain considerable control over their own destiny. Historians may, in retrospect, point out diplomatic

blunders and errors of judgment, but the more important point is that these choices, right or wrong, were made by the Indians.³⁰

Thus far, the Cherokee narrative has been placed into two categories: research on Cherokee culture and experience alone, or research on the United States' impact with the Cherokee nation. Seldom is the actual relationship between the two examined in a mutual light that acknowledges both United States' influence on the Cherokee and Cherokee influence on the United States. The Cherokee Nation is not a blip in the United States' narrative nor vice versa -- the true value of the research lies in the pursuit of a complete comprehension of the dynamic.

³⁰ Confer, 5.

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