

SLAVES AND SLAVEHOLDERS IN THE CHOCTAW NATION: 1830-1866

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Racial slavery was a critical element in the cultural development of the Choctaws and was a derivative of the peculiar institution in southern states. The idea of genial and hospitable slave owners can no more be conclusively demonstrated for the Choctaws than for the antebellum South. The participation of Choctaws in the Civil War and formal alliance with the Confederacy was dominantly influenced by the slaveholding and a connection with southern identity, but was also influenced by financial concerns and an inability to remain neutral than a protection of the peculiar institution. Had the Civil War not taken place, the rate of Choctaw slave ownership possibly would have reached the level of southern states and the Choctaws would be considered part of the South.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1861, as Civil War broke out in the United States, L.P. Ives, like many others, was faced with the difficult decision of whether to support his countrymen and fight for secession, or to follow his convictions and fight for abolition. Ives chose the latter course of action and became a cavalry officer in the Union Army. Living among slaveholders and witnessing the horrific institution drove Ives to join the Union cause. He blamed the churches for supporting the evils of slavery and threatened a traitor's death to his countrymen that opposed the cause of abolition. It is surprising to some that L.P. Ives was not a citizen of the United States, but rather a citizen of the Choctaw Nation. This surprise is somewhat typical as the subject of slaveholding and participation in the American Civil War by the Choctaw Nation is often overlooked.

The Choctaw Nation was one of the Native American nations, along with the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek (Muskogee), and Seminole, called the "Five Civilized Tribes." The five nations acquired this appellation because they had accepted so much of so-called western civilization: both virtues and flaws. Examples for the Choctaw included popularly elected representatives, a bicameral legislature, a written constitution, advanced agricultural growth, and public education. In this process of acculturation the civilized trait most often neglected that distinguished the "Five Civilized Tribes" from many other Indian nations was the holding of Africans and African Americans as slaves. The ratio of slaveholding among the Choctaws was significantly lower than that among whites in neighboring Arkansas and Texas. Consequently, slave holding by the Choctaws may have had less impact on the construction of the Choctaw Nation than on some states in the South. Nevertheless, the subject of slaveholding and its

significance warrants investigation and interpretation.¹

The institution of slavery among Native Americans has received only cursory attention by historians of the Choctaws and virtually no attention by historians of slavery in the Americas. This fact is somewhat explicable in that source material for traditional studies of slavery is far less prominent among the Native Americans. However, ignoring an element as critical as slaveholding to the development of 19th century “civilized tribes” adversely affects comprehension of the cultural evolution of Native Americans. Specifically with the Choctaws, historian Greg O’Brien recently referred to “the Choctaws adoption of racial slavery” and “intercultural relations in the South” as “neglected topics.” Currently, more books exist devoted solely to the sports and play of the Choctaws than to slaveholding practices. This is not universally the case with all Native American tribes as African slaveholding among the Cherokee has received reasonable attention from historians.²

Examination of the scholarship on Indian slaveholding, as well as American slaveholding, is necessary in order to classify slaveholding among the Choctaws. Two differing studies on Cherokee slaveholding are *Red over Black: Black Slavery among Cherokee Indians* by Robert J. Halliburton, Jr. and *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society 1540-1866* by Theda Perdue. Some mention of Choctaw slavery appears briefly in *The Choctaws in Oklahoma: From Tribe to Nation, 1855-1970* by Clara Sue Kidwell, an article entitled “Negro Slaves among the Five Civilized Tribes” by Michael F. Duran in *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family and its Tribe 1763-1995* by Joel Spring, and *Living in the Land of*

¹ John D. W. Guice, *Face to Face in Mississippi Territory, 1789-1817*. In *The Choctaw before Removal*, ed. Carolyn Keller Reeves (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 158; Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire For Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 274-275; United States Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eight Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 18.

² Greg O’Brien, *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 20.

Death: The Choctaw Nation 1830-1860 by Donna Akers. While other books and articles briefly note Indian/Choctaw slaveholding, these specific studies best represent varying historiographical schools of thought.

In the first major study to explore slavery among Native Americans, Robert J. Halliburton Jr. argued that slavery in the Cherokee Nation was “a microcosm of the ‘peculiar institution’ that existed in the southern United States.” Halliburton goes so far as to say that Cherokee slavery was “virtually identical” to southern slavery in all aspects. He also diligently attempted to disprove the notions that Cherokee slavery was less harsh than southern slavery and that slaves were adopted as members of Cherokee society. As source material, Halliburton cited growth rates of slavery, personal logs of influential chiefs, newspapers, and laws passed by the Cherokee council restricting slavery. Halliburton’s claims stimulated further examination into Cherokee slavery and reinterpretation of his conclusions.³

Two years after *Red over Black*, Theda Perdue published a study regarding Cherokee slavery that directly contradicted all of Halliburton’s conclusions. Perdue claimed that as opposed to looking at the laws that were passed regarding slavery and conclude harsh treatment, it is far more enlightening to look at the enforcement of said laws or lack of enforcement. Purdue concluded that the laws were insignificant and inconsequential. She cited many of the same sources used by Halliburton, but concluded that far more slaves were running away and taking refuge in Cherokee territory than running away from Cherokee territory indicating a less harsh slave system than that of the American South. Perdue also claimed that African slave ownership was simply a transplant of a previous tribal construct of owning other Indians as slaves. Aboriginal Cherokees owned quasi-slaves (*atsi nahsa’i*) that belonged to one master,

³ Robert Halliburton, Jr., *Red over Black: Black Slavery among the Cherokee Indians*, (Westport: Greenwood, 1977), xi, 24.

worked primarily in agriculture, and were thought to have lost their status as human. The position of the *atsi nahsa'i* could be eventually raised to equal. Perdue contends that the evolving Cherokee society maintained this far less harsh aboriginal slaveholding system with black slaves. A mixture of the viewpoints of Halliburton and Perdue normally appear in references to slavery among the Cherokees.⁴

Examination of the historical accounts of slaveholding by the Choctaw Nation reveals unresolved debates similar to the Cherokee Nation. In an article published in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Michael Doran attempted to classify Native American slaveholding by tribe and then compare his findings with slaveholding in the United States. He concluded that slaveholding among all five of the “civilized tribes” was more lenient among full-bloods compared to those of mixed heritage. Also, he concluded that black slaves were by far the most significant minority inside Native American territory. Finally, he claimed that slavery among Native Americans most closely mirrored slaveholding in the “upland South” areas such as eastern Tennessee.⁵

Clara Sue Kidwell recently concluded that African slavery among the Choctaws was a growing and widely accepted institution, but that it differed from southern slavery in that it was normally not practiced for profit. Rather, slavery among the Choctaws was more commonly practiced so that Choctaws could avoid agricultural work themselves. Kidwell did not definitively state whether slaveholding practices were more or less harsh with the Choctaws compared to southerners. Instead, she presented evidence of extreme brutality and harsh laws then presented a counterpoint with firsthand travel accounts of leniency and relative freedom

⁴ Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society 1540-1866*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 8-31, 73-75.

⁵ Michael F. Doran, “Negro Slavery among the Five Civilized Tribes,” *Annals of Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 68, 3 (Sept. 1978), 335-350.

experienced by slaves. Rather than taking a stance on the condition of slaves, Kidwell claimed that slaveholding had the greatest effect on the Choctaw education system. Many missionaries (who acted as primary teachers) harbored abolitionist sentiments that clashed with slaveholding Choctaws forcing the Choctaw government to repeatedly address the slave issue. Most missionaries complied with the Choctaws laws and were eventually ousted by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in response to their compliance of Choctaw law. Kidwell also noted that the Choctaws were aware that if they manumitted their slaves, the bordering slave states of Texas and Arkansas would likely overrun the Choctaw Nation to prevent a local safe haven for runaways.⁶

Taking a more direct approach, historian and native Choctaw Joel Spring attempted to demonstrate the role slavery played in incorporating concepts of race among the Choctaws. Spring claimed that due to the incorporation of whites, but more importantly black slaves, a racial hierarchy was established among the Choctaws. He gave one tragic example of a Choctaw youth deciding to take his own life one hour after discovering that his deceased mother was a mulatto woman “of excellent character.” Despite the fact that the boy’s father had been a chief, “he could not endure the odium which he believed attached to the word *negro*.” Spring also asserted that it was slavery that led the Choctaws to formally align themselves with the Confederacy during the Civil War despite the possible loss of annuities from the United States.⁷

In a direct contrast to Spring, historian (and also native Choctaw) Donna Akers claimed in her recent publication, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation 1830-1860*, that “the American hierarchy of race established and promulgated in many manifestations over the course

⁶ Clara Sue Kidwell, *The Choctaws in Oklahoma: From Tribe to Nation, 1855-1970* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 30-40, 46.

⁷ Joel Spring, *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family and its Tribe, 1763-1995* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1996), 122, 157-160.

of the nineteenth century did not transfer to Indian Territory.” In fact, “if one lived like a Choctaw, acted like a Choctaw, and spoke Choctaw, then one was included in the community of Choctaw people” despite racial configuration. Akers also claimed that Choctaws were more genial masters of slaves due to their tribal custom of making slaves out of captive enemies and eventually adopting them into the tribe. Akers’ final assertion regarding slavery is that as slavery was of little concern to the vast majority of the Choctaw Nation, the decision to support secession and join the Confederacy was forced upon the Choctaws and not based on mutual interest with the South.⁸

Clearly, certain aspects of slaveholding by the Choctaws have been briefly addressed by Native American historians. However, some relevant traditional questions argued regarding slaveholding in the United States have not transcended into works on Choctaw slaveholding. Most common of these is the question of the profitability of owning slaves. This issue was first formally raised in 1918 with the publication of *American Negro Slavery* by Ulrich B. Phillips. Phillips claimed that slavery was unprofitable for slaveholders and generally a compassionate institution that stood with limited opposition for several decades. The argument was dealt a devastating setback with the publication of *The Peculiar Institution* by Kenneth Stampp in 1956. Contrary to Phillips, Stampp argued that slavery was financially lucrative for owners and an immoral institution. Various tests regarding profitability have been replicated for local studies with similar results. For example, in Randolph B. Campbell’s *An Empire for Slavery*, profitability of slavery was confirmed and measured for the state of Texas. Comparable studies using available economic data have also been repeated in local studies in Arkansas. Though these states bordered post-removal Choctaw territory, no study to date has attempted to confirm

⁸ Donna L. Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), xix, 130-132, 140-142.

profitability of slaveholding among the Choctaws.⁹

An additional element addressed by American historians of slavery not applied to the Choctaw Nation is the possibility of long-term survival of slavery as an institution. It has been well-established that slavery was far from disappearing at the outbreak of the Civil War in Texas, but with the dynamic elements prominent in the Choctaw Nation, it has not been proven that slavery would continue to exist without forced abolition.¹⁰

The voids in Choctaw history regarding slavery are clearly numerous and cannot be fully filled by one thesis. Larger studies are needed. The purpose of this study is to examine all evidence currently available regarding incidence rates of slaveholding, economics of slavery, development of legal codes to control slaves, and the role of slavery in encouraging the Choctaws to join the Confederacy. Specific questions that are addressed include: What was the growth rate of slaveholding, and how did the rate compare to that among Indians and Americans? This is significant in that it has implications towards the survival and popularity of the institution. Also, what was the response of the Choctaws to the rise of slavery; were laws passed to protect slave owners as in the United States South, or was there tolerance but not encouragement? Examination of codified laws could demonstrate a desire to defend the institution of slavery and indicate the potential for slavery to continue if not for forced emancipation. Additionally, were there Choctaws who qualified as members of the planter class? If so, who were they and how large were their holdings? This could be significant if it is determined that those who owned the most slaves were also those making powerful decisions for

⁹ Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Study of the Supply, Employment, and control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918); Kenneth M Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956); Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 68-75; Kelly Houston, *Slaves and Slaveholders of Hempstead County, Arkansas*, Thesis for the Degree of Masters (unpublished), University of North Texas, 2008.

¹⁰ Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 264-266.

the Choctaw Nation. Furthermore, was slavery a main cause of the Choctaw's decision to formally side with the Confederacy in the Civil War, or was it driven by other causes?

It is important to note that this study is primarily limited to an "outsider's view" of the institution of slavery. This classification fits because personal experiences with slavery and beliefs on treatment of slaves as individuals are used sparingly in most areas and omitted in others. The reason for this omission is that information of this nature is often too limited and difficult to contextualize properly. Only in cases where context can be placed or in which indisputable conclusions can be drawn is this information included. An additional limitation of this study is that source material is only in the form of English sources. As Choctaw newspapers were printed in both English and Choctaw and most written sources recorded in English, the impact of this limitation is minimal. The sources excluded include anything written in Choctaw that has not been translated and anything passed through oral tradition. These sources may have validity, but language and publication gaps prohibit their current exploration.

Though the focus of the study is the post-removal Choctaws, it is important to understand certain elements of the traditional and pre-removal Choctaw history in order to provide context for post-removal information. The pre-removal Choctaw territory was based in central and eastern Mississippi. It is not known exactly when the Choctaws came into Mississippi, but it is commonly believed that they traveled with the neighboring Chickasaw tribe then split into separate tribes. The traditional Choctaws were organized by a democratic system that divided the tribe into three districts: The Northwestern, the Northeastern, and the Southern. One chief, given the title of *mingo*, was elected by the men of each district as their representative. Each *mingo* appointed captains who assisted in regional government and tribal councils. "Elected officials, unlimited debate, civilian rule, and local self-government enabled the Choctaws to

achieve an amazingly efficient and yet democratic political system.”¹¹

Traditional Choctaws were proficient at diverse skills such as farming, herding, and hunting which created resiliency to uncontrollable forces such as thin herds, droughts, and weak harvests. As farmers, Choctaws primarily harvested corn as a staple crop, but also cultivated beans, melons, and squash. They constantly gathered surpluses of corn which were sold to neighboring tribes or used as feed for herds of cattle. Deer hunting represented a third form of both food and trade as deerskins could be traded to neighboring tribes. Economic diversification as a construct of traditional society increased stability and allowed for consistent population growth.¹²

Various groups of Europeans encroached constantly into the Choctaw territory, starting with the French around 1700. Claims to Choctaw lands by European countries changed constantly throughout the eighteenth century, exposing the Choctaws to a variety of European influences. The French lost their claims to Mississippi territory to the British with the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Not long after that, Great Britain evacuated West Florida (which included Choctaw territory) following a defeat at the hands of Spain in 1781. The Spanish ceded the same land east of the Mississippi River to the United States in order to quell American aggression in 1795. As an organized, grounded, economically stable tribe, the Choctaws seemed on the surface to contain the means to resist cultural domination. Historians debate whether the influx of European interest decimated the Choctaws’ culture or Choctaw culture remained dominant. That debate is outside the scope of this thesis, however, what is agreed upon is that the Choctaws

¹¹ Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 7-12.

¹² DeRosier, *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians*, 8-11; Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 18.

had “to adapt under pressure to new geopolitical realities.”¹³

One significant adaptation that modified pre-removal Choctaw society was the transition in concept of power and the means of obtaining power. Though *mingos* were democratically elected, individuals were viewed as powerful in traditional Choctaw culture if they could produce items essential to Choctaw survival. Examples of this include “craftsmanship, farming, trade, shamanistic abilities like rainmaking, diplomacy, correct manipulation of supernatural forces, and warfare utilized to protect kinspeople” or warfare to avenge acts of transgression. Women were seen as powerful for skill in harvesting crops and were subsequently extended primary responsibility for farming and domestic tasks. Men would assist with heavy labor in farming, but did not take part in day to day tasks in the fields. Opposite of women, men could obtain power by demonstrating exceptional hunting prowess, something that indicated an ability to access spiritual power.¹⁴

These traditional notions of power were progressively modified by contact with European traders. The ability to obtain advanced European merchandize became synonymous with power and outweighed interests with spiritual power. Both elites who wanted to keep their societal position and non-elites who desired to rise in Choctaw society engaged in heavy trade and accumulated significant debt. This involvement in international markets and a materialistic fascination with foreign materials such as guns, woolen cloth, and metal goods had catastrophic results on the independence enjoyed by the Choctaws.¹⁵

Under the Presidency of Thomas Jefferson, it was proposed that the large debts owed by

¹³ Greg O’Brien, *Choctaw’s in a Revolutionary Age 1750-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 9-11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 12-14.

¹⁵ O’Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*, 6-12; Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 44-63; Donna Akers, *Living in the Land of Death*, 99.

the Choctaws to the United States and private firms, both domestic and foreign, be eliminated in exchange for land concessions. Through three treaties during the Jefferson administration, the Choctaws ceded over 7,600,000 acres of prime farmland in exchange for cancelation of all old debts. The third treaty, the Treaty of Mount Dexter (1805), offered so small a compensation for such a large tract of land that President Jefferson refused to present it to the Senate for approval. He changed his mind three years later when he needed political support from the Western United States and reluctantly presented the Treaty to the Senate.

The Choctaws clearly stated in the Treaty of Mount Dexter that they would entertain no further negotiations that involved land concessions and maintained that policy for fifteen years. As the desire for Choctaw land proved insatiable, American's found a negotiator the Choctaw would meet with: Andrew Jackson. The negotiations were agreed upon by the Choctaws out of respect for their former commander from the Battle of New Orleans. Through a series of bribes including food and free access to alcohol along with threats of force, the Choctaws, led by famed Chief Pushmataha, agreed that trading land was preferable to extinction and signed the Treaty of Doak's Stand (1820). In exchange for 5,169,788 acres in Mississippi, the Choctaws were granted 13,000,000 acres in modern-day Oklahoma and Arkansas.¹⁶

Contrary to the aspirations of Jackson and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, very few Choctaws emigrated west of the Mississippi River. Rather, they chose to remain on approximately 10,000,000 acres of Choctaw territory in Mississippi. Over the course of the next decade, the territory and later state of Mississippi passed laws against Native Americans hoping to encourage emigration west of the Mississippi River. The election of Andrew Jackson as President encouraged these policies. In 1829, Mississippi passed several laws that enlarged the size of counties surrounding Indian Territory to include Indian Territory and demanded that all

¹⁶ DeRosier, *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians*, 36-44; O'Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*, 10.

Indians within Mississippi borders submit to state law. The proclamation frightened the Choctaws who responded by endorsing a treaty proposed by Chief Greenwood Leflore in which all Choctaw land east of the Mississippi River would be ceded in exchange for substantial annuities and paid removal. The price of approximately \$50,000,000 was viewed by President Jackson as too high, but demonstrated to Jackson that the Choctaws conceivably would peacefully submit to removal.¹⁷

Following the rejection of Leflore's treaty proposal, President Jackson sent Secretary of War John Eaton and John Coffee to negotiate a more favorable proposal. The Choctaws flatly refused the terms of Eaton's offer for removal and threatened to resist. Eaton responded with a threat of force and offer of bribes for those willing to sign the treaty on his terms. According to several other accounts, Eaton sent home the majority of the tribe with the exception of Leflore and others that would accept sizable bribes to sign. It is also confirmed that Eaton explicitly banned missionaries Cyrus Byington and Cyrus Kingsbury, two men who had resided among the Choctaws for years, from attending the negotiations. Whether by fraudulent or legitimate grounds, the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed on September 27, 1830, and ceded all remaining Choctaw land east of the Mississippi river.¹⁸

Under the terms of the Treaty, the tribe was to be moved in thirds once a year for three years. The conditions were far from the humane removal that Jackson and others promised. In the winter of 1831, French writer Alexis de Tocqueville witnessed part of the Choctaws emigration to the west. De Tocqueville claimed that the Choctaws were forced to cross the Mississippi under brutal conditions.

The Indians brought their families with them; there were among them the wounded, the sick, newborn babies, and old men on the point of death. They had neither tents nor

¹⁷ DeRosier, *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians*, 40-44; O'Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*, 147.

¹⁸ DeRosier, *ibid*, 116-130; Akers, *ibid*, 89-92.

wagons, but only some provisions and weapons. I saw them embark to cross the great river, and the sight will never fade from my memory. Neither sob nor complaint rose from that silent assembly. Their afflictions were of long standing, and they felt them to be irremediable.¹⁹

As many as 6,000 Choctaws attempted to remain in Mississippi and retain their lands utilizing a clause in Article 14 of the Treaty. Though their claims were generally dismissed, a sizable amount of Choctaws including deposed Chief Greenwood Leflore remained in Mississippi when the remainder of the tribe moved west. Removal was officially completed after three years, with the end result being over 13,000 Choctaws in modern-day Oklahoma and approximately 4,000 in Mississippi.²⁰

The Choctaws had gone from a powerful and independent nation occupying prime land to a divided nation struggling to build new homes and new lives in a foreign land after fewer than 130 years of contact with Europeans and Americans. Less than thirty years later, the Choctaws were a nation that in most aspects resembled an American state and were in consideration for statehood. A significant factor in this transformation was the increase of slaveholding.

¹⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 45.

²⁰ United States Department of State. "The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek." September 15th, 1830. *United States Treaties and Other Agreements* 24, pt.1; Muriel H. Wright, "The Removal of the Choctaws to the Indian Territory," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 1, No.2 (June 1928), 115.

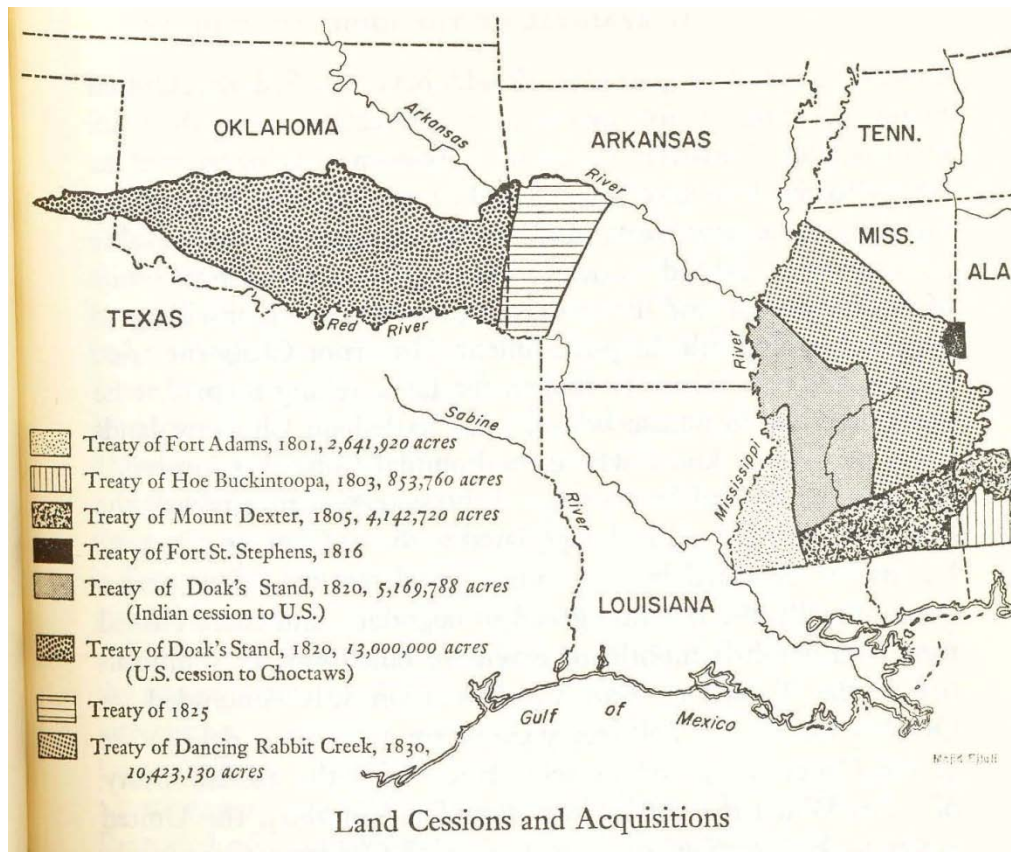


Figure 1: Land Cessions and Acquisitions²¹

²¹ Facsimile copy from: DeRosier, *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians*, 47.

CHAPTER 2
THE ORIGINS OF SLAVERY, PROMINENT SLAVEHOLDERS,
AND RUNAWAYS

The aboriginal roots of slaveholding by the Choctaws are remarkably similar to the neighboring Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes. Examination of these roots establishes a foundation from which slaveholding practices in the post-removal Choctaw Nation can be examined. The assumption that slaveholding was an institution solely adopted by Choctaws of mixed origins known as “mixed-bloods,” also warrants assessment. Inspection of both prominent and small-scale slaveholders appears to be the most effective method of measuring mixed-blood versus full-blood commitment to slaveholding. This inspection revealed that slaveholding initially appeared as a full-blood institution that was passed to mixed-bloods, and that both full-blood and mixed-blood owners faced the same problems in holding slaves.

To fully understand the drastic changes that slavery (among other elements) made with the post-removal Choctaws, it is critical to understand first certain elements of the traditional full-blood civilization. One key element that defined the Choctaw was their rigid and specific gender roles. In the Choctaw language, the word for male was *Nakni* which was a synonym for warrior and bravery. This definition represented the exact role that a man was supposed to occupy: that of a brave and noble warrior. Names were the fundamental signifiers of masculinity and were of primary importance to a Choctaw male. Males and females received birth names from their mothers, but the maternally given names only normally remained through childhood for Choctaw males. By participating in a successful war party that killed an enemy or by demonstrating exceptional hunting prowess, males received adult names from elite men. British agent James Adair described this practice in detail in one of his several attempts at understanding

Choctaw cultural practices:

When the Indians distinguish themselves in war, their names are always compounded, drawn from certain roots suitable to their intention and expressive of the character of the person, so that their names joined together, often convey a clear and distinct idea of several circumstances—as of the time and place, where the battle was fought, of the number and rank of their captives, slain.²²

Males who had not demonstrated fighting ability or sufficient hunting skill and had to resort to an agricultural existence were subject to ridicule and insult along with exclusion from elite status.²³

In direct contrast to the male role, women's gender role derived meaning from the Choctaw word *Ohyo*, which also meant “harvester, a gather of fruits, a searcher for harvest grounds,” and “person who makes demands.”²⁴ Inheritance and possession was passed through the females, which further indicated their important position. Most critical to this study, it was females who conducted virtually all daily agricultural work. This practice has been confirmed by several travel logs, but it has also been noted that females were not worked excessively in the manner of a traditional agricultural slave. The females also held the critical role of deciding the fate of captives: torture and death or enslavement and potential tribal adoption. It was seen as a major blow to masculinity for a Choctaw male to have to rely on food that was grown by women or to have to conduct daily labor beside a woman. Thus, the act of enslaving a captive from another nation and forcing him into agricultural tasks symbolically represented a reduction in status to that of effeminate male.²⁵

²² James Adair, *History of the American Indians*, ed. Samuel Cole Williams (Johnson City: Watuga Press, 1930), 201.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Greg O'Brien, “Trying to Look like Men: Changing Notions of Masculinity among Choctaw Elites in the Early Republic”, in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend & Lori Glover, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 51-55.

²⁵ Theda Perdue, *Nations Remembered: An Oral History of the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, and Seminoles in Oklahoma 1865-1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 93; Greg O'Brien, “Trying to Look like Men”, 56; John R Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians*

The status of a slave was traditionally not permanent, but rather a means of replacing production from a recently deceased Choctaw. Some traditional slaves enjoyed a large degree of autonomy and were merely required to contribute a portion of their crops to a master. In certain cases, slaves could be fully adopted by the Choctaw Nation and would obtain all the rights and benefits of a native Choctaw.²⁶

The Choctaws did not base their traditional enslavement of captives on race. It is feasible, therefore, that Choctaws at times held white slaves. This presumption is supported by a treaty signed between the Spanish, Chickasaw Nation, Alabama Nation, and Choctaw Nation in 1784. The treaty specified that the Native Americans “renounce for ever the custom of raising scalps, and of making slaves of our white captives.” Specific instances of white captives being transformed into Choctaw slaves have yet to be documented, but most likely did exist.²⁷

Though the Choctaws had a tradition of holding others as slaves, they in turn experienced the atrocities of enslavement at the hands of rival natives and European intruders. The Chickasaw tribe allied themselves with the French and Spanish prior to 1804 and frequently sold Choctaw captives to their allies. Chickasaws normally attempted to enslave Choctaw women (after killing Choctaw men) due to their agricultural knowledge and the belief that Choctaw women were easier to control than men. Several accounts exist of Chickasaws claiming that they killed Choctaw men daily in order to capture and sell female family members.²⁸

The transition from quasi-slavery based upon captivity to racially based enslavement occurred gradually around 1800 and was based more upon social status than a need for labor.

(Washington: United States Government Printing Office 1931), 139; Michelene E Pesantubbee, *Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 57.

²⁶ Donna Akers, *Living in the Land of Death, The Choctaw Nation 1830-1860* (East Lansing: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 140.

²⁷ Michelene E Pesantubbee, *Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 57.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 90-100.

Early examples of Choctaws holding racially based slaves included almost exclusively full-bloods such as Franchimastabé, Mushulatubbee, Pushmataha, and Captain Little Leader. These prominent leaders understood that slaves were useful commodities that could be traded with outside countries. Also, as European/American symbols became associated with masculinity, power, and leadership, ownership of slaves became critical to maintaining or advancing societal status. This fact was apparent to Franchimastabé, an early nineteenth century chief, who traded African American slaves and horses among other commodities with the French and English. Thus, the introduction of racial slavery to the Choctaws came from pure-bloods like Franchimastabé who exploited racial slaves not for labor, but for trade value.²⁹

Additional contemporary full-blood Choctaws such as Pushmataha and Mushulatubbee assisted in the evolution of Choctaw slaveholding from market commodity and status symbol to useful laborer. Mushulatubbee and Pushmataha, both powerful chiefs, demonstrated that utilization of large-scale slave labor did not originate from half-bloods, but rather from progressive full-bloods that embraced the slaveholding system. Pushmataha reportedly owned between ten and twenty slaves, and Mushulatubbee owned approximately ten slaves. Historian Donna Akers implied that full-blood chiefs that held black slaves did so out of necessity due to their roles as chiefs and not out of financial exploitation. This proposal could be justifiable if the number of slaves was low; however, with slaveholdings near the level of the southern planter class, this argument appears to be flimsy.³⁰

The real significance of slaveholding chiefs like Pushmataha is that they symbolized a transition among Choctaws that accepted elements of white culture. Pushmataha was a proud Choctaw who regularly fought for his people, but also a brigadier general in the United States

²⁹ Greg O'Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 86-87.

³⁰ Akers, *Living in the Land of Death*, 70, 71, 115.

Army who reportedly led an important charge against the British flank at the Battle of New Orleans. He also represented the Choctaws in a refusal to join forces with Tecumseh against the United States, but in all ways and by all people was seen as Choctaw. Pushmataha married a mixed-blood woman and had his children educated in both English and Choctaw in order to better prepare them for inevitable future relations between Choctaws and whites. His acceptance of elements of white society, including slavery, was based neither on race nor an abandonment of Choctaw culture, but on a common understanding that elite status was partially contingent upon an ability to coexist with white culture. Thus, the prevalence of mixed-blood Choctaws owning slaves did not indicate that slaveholding was a mixed-blood institution or a rejection of Choctaw values, but a continuation of an institution originally embraced by full-blood elites.

The transition from primarily full-blood to both full- and mixed-blood slave ownership and continuation of Choctaw identity can best be demonstrated by exploring prominent mixed-blood leaders. Peter P. Pitchlynn (*Hat-choo-tuck-nee* or “snapping turtle), a principal chief and tribal representative to the United States government, was the son of a United States interpreter who had been raised by Choctaws and a full-blood Choctaw woman. Sophia Folsom Pitchlynn, Pitchlynn’s mother, was bilingual and raised all of her children to be bilingual and familiar with both Choctaw and white American culture. With regard to slaveholding, Peter’s father owned fifty bondsmen which was more than anyone else in pre-removal Choctaw territory. These slaves fell to Peter with the death of his father in 1835. Pitchlynn increased the number of slaves from fifty to at least eighty-one by 1860 and used his slaves to cultivate cotton, corn, and other crops. He also regularly took slaves with him when taking extended trips to Washington D.C., presumably as personal servants. The fact that no serious scholars have asserted that Pitchlynn was anything but Choctaw and that the Choctaws popularly elected him principal chief despite

being a slave-holding, Masonic Lutheran suggests that racial slaveholding had become an accepted trait of Choctaw elites.³¹

Pitchlynn himself recognized that the considerable transitions underway in the Choctaw Nation resulted in part from slaveholding. Particularly, Pitchlynn noted that Choctaws were treated differently than other Native American originally located in the Northern states. He articulated this argument in a joint-statement presented to President Franklin Pierce which stated “We are beginning to feel that there is some difference in the present disposition and policy of the government towards the tribes inhabiting different latitudes; that were we Northern, we would experience less difficulty.” The statement addressed specific grievances, then concluded “Finally, sir, the very unwelcome and painful question has arisen in our minds, whether the fact that our being Southern and slaveholding has anything to do with the apparent disposition to act liberally towards us; whether under a Northern administration of Indian affairs we are to fail in our efforts to obtain justice for our people.” This revealing appeal indicated that Choctaws after adopting the institution of slavery had begun to think of themselves as separated from the North and bound with the South.³²

As slaveholding southern Indians, the Choctaws had to face the same problems that plagued southern white slaveholders which included runaways. Regardless of race or ethnicity, slaves running away from masters in search of freedom were common practice in virtually all slaveholding societies. Large groups of runaways often founded maroon colonies while individual runaways typically sought free land or posed as a free person. It is important to note that the act of running away did not necessarily indicate poor or brutal conditions, but rather a

³¹ David W. Beard, *Peter Pitchlynn: Chief of the Choctaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 12-20, 44; The Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, Schedule 1, Free Population.

³² “Papers Relating to the Claims of the Choctaw Nation against the United States arising under the Treaty of 1830” (Washington: A.O.P. Nicholson, 1855), 54.

desire to escape slavery. The typical response from slave owners to this situation was to attempt to repossess their property. Posting an advertisement in a newspaper with the promise of a reward was a common method of attempting to locate runaway slaves in the United States as well as the Choctaw Nation. The details that appear in runaway slave advertisements are useful in that they often contain a rare honesty regarding the conditions in which slaves lived and allow for speculation as to the rationale for running away.

For example, one reason that a slave could run away from a Choctaw master was to return to family or a former master. A potential example of this appeared in the *Choctaw Intelligencer* on December 3, 1851. The advertisement offered a \$75 reward for the return of “a Negro man named George.” There was a brief and non-specific physical description of George and some mention of clothing and possessions. The advertisement concluded with the speculation that “it is thought he will endeavor to make his way in that direction” towards Fort Smith, on the Arkansas border, because “the negro says he formerly belonged to a gentleman” who lived in that area. It is unclear whether the previous master provided superior treatment or whether the slave was returning to a family, but what can be deduced is that “George” had a clear reason to risk retribution in order to return to a former master.³³

This advertisement also assists in confirming that Choctaws partook in both buying and selling of slaves in the slave trade. The sheer increase in number of slaves from the 1830s to 1860 as well as sales records confirmed that Choctaws had purchased slaves; however, records of sales have proven difficult to confirm. It has only been confirmed in one other instance in post-removal Choctaw records that Choctaws actually sold slaves. Missionary Elizabeth Lee wrote in a letter to her mother that a slave “that took care of me when I was sick has been sold & taken away. It made us feel pretty bad to have her go, she used to come here every chance she

³³ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, December 3, 1851.

could get to see us.” Lee believed the sale was not appealing to the slave, and described that “when she came in the last time to bid us good bye the poor creature cried & we could not keep from crying with her.” All other discovered receipts of sale have involved Choctaws purchasing slaves from foreign buyers, or from buyers of unknown origin.³⁴

As opposed to returning to family or original masters, slaves sometimes ran away from both family and original masters. An advertisement that fits this description appeared in the *Choctaw Intelligencer* on March 12, 1851. The notice offered the reward of one hundred dollars for the return of a slave named Bob who “left my premises about the first day of June, and although he was almost raised all his life in this country, and has many relatives, a wife and children here, I have not heard from him since.” The slave owner’s bewilderment at Bob’s disappearance despite familial ties is partially explained as Bob’s physical appearance is outlined. The owner admits that Bob “probably has some marks of the whip upon his back” in addition to “rather bad teeth,” a “gap in the front part of the upper jaw,” and “burned upon one of his arms from about the elbow down, the soar of which is yet to be seen.” It would not be unreasonable to conclude from this description that Bob ran away because of inhumane treatment from his master. These advertisements are specific cases in specific areas and as such will not be used to try and demonstrate that Choctaw slavery was more harsh, less harsh, or equally as harsh as southern slavery; however, what can be safely asserted is that traditional southern practices toward slavery including selling slaves and physical punishments appeared more prevalent in these cases than the traditional Choctaw slavery featuring adoption and equality.³⁵

The largest reward offered for any runaway slave introduces the additional possible factor

³⁴ Mrs. Lee to Mother, January 1861, *The Colonel Dawes Collection*, Western Histories Collection, Box 2, Folder 42.

³⁵ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, March 12, 1851.

of opportunity in motivating a slave to run away. Occupations that granted access to transportation and weapons gave certain slaves the opportunity to run away and was present in the Choctaw Nation. H.N. Folsom, a prominent Choctaw, offered a \$200 reward for the return of an approximately 29 year old “likely negro man, named Aleck.” When Aleck escaped, he took with him “a sorrel horse pony, stout made, and paces fast, about 8 years old. Also, a tolerable dragoon saddle with new light leather skirts, a bridle and martingales. Also, a good double barreled shot-gun, percussion lock.” It is likely that Aleck leveraged his position as a blacksmith in order to obtain these possessions that aided in his escape. There is no mention of physical abuse as a motivation, other than a brief reference to “small scar on his face.” An additional reward of \$50 was offered for the return of only the pony, bridle, saddle, and gun. The ad concluded with the corollary that a \$25 reward would be paid for Aleck’s scalp if he could not be taken alive. The final phrase of this advertisement can be logically interpreted in two different ways. Since Aleck was certainly armed and likely to resist recapture, adding a clause that ensured payment in the case that he could not be taken alive could reassure those looking to collect on the reward that they would still receive some payment if there was a deadly struggle. Additionally, this codicil reveals that H.N. Folsom did not value the life of Aleck in any way other than in financial terms. This revelation gives some credence to the observation of one missionary that “there are many (Choctaws) who will no more hesitate to take the life of a negro than of a dog.”³⁶

Though many Choctaw slaves that ran away apparently were motivated by internal factors like treatment, newspaper advertisements reveal that slaves could also be enticed to run away by outsiders. One such ad outlined the theft of horses and slaves from Choctaw territory

³⁶ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, February, 19, 1851; Cyrus Kingsbury to Brother, December 1865, *Cyrus Kingsbury Collection*.

and possibly Arkansas and Texas. The Choctaw Light Horsemen, the official Choctaw police force, determined the “thefts seem to be the result of a connected plan, and we hope that the citizens of Texas, Arkansas, and the Cherokee nation, will be on the look out.” The warning continued with the supposition “that a ‘nahoolushi’ (the son of a white man) is at the bottom of it,” and that “it is also supposed that he has enticed away negroes.” The caution speculated that the white man responsible will attempt to sell the horses and slaves in Texas or Arkansas, and concluded “Runaways and outlaws are suitable residents for no country, and means should be taken to prevent their increase among us.” The action of stealing slaves from the Choctaws and selling them to others represented a reversal from pre-removal society in which the Choctaws had been accused of stealing and selling slaves from Europeans.³⁷

As slaves of Choctaws ran away, they sought various locations to reside in order to maintain their freedom. Illinois was geographically the closest free state at approximately 580 miles away. The journey would require a dangerous trek through Missouri, and could be undone by the fugitive slave laws. Slaves would not receive assistance from the famed Underground Railroad as there were no stops through Indian Territory. Mexico was geographically the closest free territory without a fugitive slave law, but the difficult terrain and weather in Texas made this a hazardous route. No records exist to date confirming Choctaw’s slaves successfully running away to Mexico; however, current research underway from historian Andrew Torget on Mexican archives holds the potential to uncover narratives from slaves that accomplished the journey to Mexico. It would appear that the most common location sought by runaway Choctaw slaves was to live with other Native Americans. A posting in the *Choctaw Intelligencer* advised that “it is said that there are as many as 9 runaway negroes in custody at Fort Wishita and that some 70 of the same sort are at Camp Arbuckle who have been taken from the immortal Seminole, that *Wild*

³⁷ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, August 21, 1850.

Cut of humanity.” Whether these slaves were stolen, runaways, or had been taken from the relocated Seminoles in Oklahoma or the Seminoles remaining in Florida is undetermined.³⁸

Finally, the assertion that Native Americans harbored runaway slaves does appear in one runaway advertisement. The author of the ad, a man from Lafayette, Arkansas, asserts that two of his slaves had run away to live “among the wild Indians.” It is doubtful that the Choctaw would fit the categorization of “wild Indians” and more likely that this ad was posted in a Choctaw newspaper as “wild Indians” did not often roam with a printing press. The action of harboring or purchasing the freedom of runaways is repeatedly scorned in the *Choctaw Intelligencer*. An October 1851 article entitled “Decidedly Sensible” praised the “New York Day Book” for a proclamation against purchasing runaways on the basis that “we have quite enough of them in our midst, and it is, in our opinion, better to send them back to their masters, where they are properly taken care of, than to keep them here to become drunkards and paupers.”³⁹

These individual instances, interesting and enlightening as they may be, are limited in usefulness as they potentially fail to represent the Choctaw Nation as a whole. Analysis of available numerical data assists in affirming several of the conclusions in this chapter and offering additional analysis.

³⁸ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, November 13th, 1850.

³⁹ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, August 1, 1850; *Choctaw Intelligencer*, October 1, 1851.

CHAPTER 3

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS: GROWTH AND EXPANSION

FROM REMOVAL TO EMANCIPATION

Quantitative analysis is useful in answering questions relevant to any discussion on slavery. Analysis of incidence rates, age and gender breakdown of slaves, geographic distribution, and levels of financial investment allow for meaningful comparison to slaveholding in neighboring states. Examination and analysis of the available numerical data found in federal census records, probate records, internal census, and official legal documents, provides answers to several questions including the progression of slavery and extent of slaveholding, the demographics of slaveowners within the Choctaw Nation, the value of slaves, and the profitability of slavery. Perhaps one of the most notable conclusions that quantitative data supports is that black slaveholding was not unknown to the Choctaws in the pre-removal period and was a quite familiar institution during the post-removal period as well.

Prior to conducting quantitative analysis on the Choctaw Nation, it was necessary to first determine who qualified as Choctaw. Donna Akers is arguably the best authority on this subject as she is one of the few historians to study the Choctaws from an insider's perspective. A native member of the Choctaw Nation and fluent in the Choctaw language, Akers wrote *Living in the Land of Death* as a revisionist argument against the works of Grant Foreman and Angie Debo. Akers claimed that race was a minimal factor in the Choctaw Nation; one that was overridden by ethnicity. She also asserted that Foreman and Debo (as well as virtually all historians of the Choctaw) saw a dominant racial structure only because they were looking for it and studied the elite members of society exclusively.⁴⁰ According to Akers, actions and lifestyle outweighed the

⁴⁰ Donna Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 140-141.

concept of race in determining if an individual was Choctaw. Specifically, if a person “lived like a Choctaw, acted like a Choctaw, and spoke Choctaw” then inclusion in Choctaw society would be granted despite “one’s racial heritage.”⁴¹

Using Akers’ definition, the parameters for classification as Choctaw include individuals living in original Choctaw territory prior to the removal, those who remained in Mississippi following removal, and those who emigrated to modern Oklahoma following the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830. These groups will be covered separately, as quantitative data encompassing all three groups does not exist. The primary source documentation for those living in Choctaw territory prior to removal comes almost exclusively from surveys conducted by the United States government in preparation for removal. The second group, those who remained in Mississippi, is examined solely from the viewpoint of an elite Choctaw Chief due to a lack of other sources. The eighth census of the United States (1860), Choctaw census (1867), and records from large slaveholders are used as the main sources for the group that relocated to modern-day Oklahoma.

Analysis of the few sources available on slaveholding in pre-removal Choctaw society establishes a baseline from which growth of slavery can roughly be measured. Documentation of Choctaw population and demographics was conducted mostly by speculation prior to 1831. The first comprehensive census to take place in the Choctaw Nation prior to removal was conducted by the United States. The motivation for this census was to prepare the United States to remove the Choctaw people from Mississippi into Oklahoma. The categories covered included name, acres cultivated, locality, family size, males over sixteen, males and females under sixteen, total acreages, and was divided into three regions: Leflore, Moshulatubbe, and

⁴¹ Akers, *Living in the Land of Death*, xix; Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Study of the Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918).

Nitachacha. Though slaves were not included as an individual category, Armstrong, the United States agent charged with personally completing the survey, included the number of slaves in numerous households under the heading of “locality.” The lack of a distinctive category for tabulation of slaves is a flaw in the usability of Armstrong’s census in that it would appear that Armstrong was under no obligation to count the number of slaves for Choctaw territory. This flaw is apparent in the Moshulatubbe Region where the section of “locality” is left blank for almost the entire roll.⁴²

Armstrong’s numbers indicate that there were 2,680 Choctaw familial units including 17,963 individuals and 499 slaves in Choctaw Territory in 1831. A later report published with Armstrong’s census in Congress indicated that an additional 1,000 people of Choctaw descent were living west of Choctaw territory.⁴³ The 499 counted slaves were spread amongst 80 families, averaging 6.2 slaves per family. Three hundred seventy-eight out of the 499 slaves (69.3 percent) were concentrated in the Leflore Region, while 78 (30.4%) resided in the Nitachacha Region. Only three Choctaws on the Armstrong census would qualify as planter class (owning twenty or more slaves).⁴⁴

Although he is listed as “U.S. Interpreter,” John Pitchlynn is included among the Choctaw slaveholders. The reason for this inclusion is that Pitchlynn married a Choctaw woman, had a half-blood Choctaw child (Peter Pitchlynn), spoke the Choctaw language, and

⁴² Choctaw Armstrong Rolls 1831, Office of Indian Affairs: National Archives, Fort Worth, Tx. Microfilm Roll A-39. Israel Folsom lived in Moshulatubbe Region at the time of the Armstrong census and is listed as having no slaves. In the 1860 census he is listed as owning 11 slaves and his relatives H.S. Folsom and Sampson Folsom are listed as owning 50 and 17 slaves (respectively) in 1860. It is conceded that individual wealth can accrue over a thirty-year period, but this change partially supports the conclusion that Armstrong’s records are incomplete.

⁴³ United States Senate Document 512, *23rd Congress, Vol.3*, 1831. The number of families and potential slaveholding practices of the estimated Western group is not indicated.

⁴⁴ Choctaw Armstrong Rolls 1831, Office of Indian Affairs: National Archives, Fort Worth, Tx. Microfilm Roll A-39. The discrepancy between percentages is accounted for by rounding and the one slave that was counted in Moshulatubbe Region. These numbers were calculated from the Armstrong Rolls, but slightly modified in that those identified as United States Representatives were not included with the exception of John Pitchlynn. .

resided among the Choctaw people. John Pitchlynn passed the basic parameters for inclusion based on the parameters outlined by Akers.

By these calculations, only 2.9 percent of Choctaw families owned slaves in pre-removal society. That number rises slightly to 4.1 percent if the 760 families in Moshulatubbe Region are subtracted due to the absence of data on slaveholding. The potential of 4 percent slave ownership demonstrates that slavery was existent in the pre-removal Choctaw Nation. Though it is not indicated by Armstrong that these were African slaves, the practice of enslaving members of rival tribes had decreased to the point of disappearance by the date of the Armstrong census. Also, it has been concluded by historians of Choctaw removal that African slaves were sent to the removal territory in Oklahoma to attempt to establish new farms and houses.⁴⁵

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek included a clause that granted land allotments east of the Mississippi River for those who did not desire to relocate.⁴⁶ The justification for this loophole, according to Secretary of War John Eaton who negotiated the treaty, was to enable the mixed-bloods (white and Choctaw) who had improved the land and were closer to fitting in as United States citizens to integrate into the United States. Unfortunately for Eaton, as many as 6,000 Choctaw (300 times higher than he anticipated) attempted to remain in Mississippi. The promises of land allotments were almost always blocked or ignored by officials, and most Choctaw lost everything.⁴⁷ Numerical sources for this group regarding slavery and slave retention are not available. Sources that are available refer to one of the mixed-bloods that John Eaton was attempting to keep in Mississippi: Greenwood Leflore.

⁴⁵ Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 158-161.

⁴⁶ United States Department of State. "The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek." *United States Treaties and Other Agreements* 24, pt.1.

⁴⁷ Samuel J. Wells and Roseanna Tubby, *After Removal: The Choctaw in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986) 80. Eaton resorted to threat, extortion, and bribery to force the Choctaws to sign the treaty. See *Eaton to F.W. Armstrong*, April 26, 1831. Office of Indian Affairs: National Archives, Fort Worth, Tx.

Following the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, Greenwood Leflore was deposed as *mingo* and opted to remain in Mississippi. Leflore acquired a large amount of land and slaves partially as result of the questionable activities at the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek according to historian Charles Syndor. By 1860, he owned nearly 400 slaves and more than 1,000 acres of prime farmland. Between September 1 and November 11, 1851, his slaves harvested 117,301 pounds of cotton. Leflore's experiences were far from common; most Choctaws who remained in Mississippi fought a losing battle to keep their land or obtain wealth.⁴⁸

The vast majority of the Choctaw people and the official Choctaw Nation emigrated to modern-day Oklahoma. Slavery was no more a numerically static institution among the Choctaw Nation than in the United States from 1830 to 1860. Questions regarding the potential increase in slave population, aspects of the nature of Choctaw slavery, geographic saturation, future growth potential, and prospective profitability can be answered with the available quantifiable data.

A significant increase in slave population in states bordering the Choctaw Nation has been chronicled by several studies.⁴⁹ However, there was no guarantee that the factors that led to a slave increase in bordering states would be replicated in Choctaw territory. Cyrus Kingsbury, a reluctant slaveholder and missionary who lived among the Choctaws, claimed that nine out of ten Choctaws had no interest in and limited toleration for slavery.⁵⁰ In an environment of reputed indifference towards slavery, somehow the number of bondsmen in the Choctaw Nation more than quadrupled while the Choctaw population decreased in the thirty-year period from

⁴⁸ Charles S. Syndor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 131-132.

⁴⁹ Randolph B. Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis: Harrison County Texas, 1850-1880* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1963), 264-267. For Arkansas, see Kelly Houston, *Slaves and Slaveholders of Hempstead County, Arkansas*, Thesis Prepared for the Degree of Master of Arts, University of North Texas, 2008.

⁵⁰ Reverend Cyrus Kingsbury to Board, November 19, 1855, Box 2, Folder 3. *Cyrus Kingsbury Collection* (Hereafter cited as WHC).

removal to the Civil War.

As a whole, slavery in the Choctaw Nation increased from 499 in 1831 to 2,298 in 1860 – an increase of over 460 percent. This number is undoubtedly deflated in that several slave-owning Choctaw stayed with their slaves in Mississippi at time of removal. The exact number of slaves who made the journey with their masters from Mississippi to Oklahoma cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy with currently available sources. Assertions can be made in certain cases where slave owners appear on both the Armstrong census and the United States 1860 Census with slaves, but no decisive number has yet emerged. The total of Choctaw citizens decreased during roughly the same time frame from 17,963 to 13,666.⁵¹ Part of this decrease can be explained by the approximately 6,000 Choctaws who attempted to remain in Mississippi. Clearly with the trend of an increase in slave population and decrease in Choctaw population, slaves accounted for a larger portion of the Choctaw population in 1860 than in 1830.

	1830	1860⁵²
Number of Choctaw	17,963	13,666
Percent of Population	97.3%	85.6%
Number of Slaves	499	2298 ⁵³
Percent of Population	2.7%	14.4%

Table 1: Population Demographics, 1830 to 1860

⁵¹ Indian Archives Division. *Choctaw National Census of 1867*. Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁵² Ibid, 1860 Choctaw free population estimated from 1867 Census returns. Slave population determined by The Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, Schedule 2 (Hereafter cited as “US Census, 1860, Schedule 2”). Schedule 1 (Free Population) did not include Choctaw citizens and could not be used for comparison.

⁵³ This number includes “twenty-four of the negroes marked Nominal Slaves were sold into Slavery for a total of twenty five years (to avoid being Expelled from the nation by an act & that effect-)”. This also includes three slaves labeled “nominal slaves,” likely because they were 100 years old at the time of the census.

The increase in slaveholding did not go unnoticed; an 1858 traveler reported that many of the Choctaw were “quite wealthy, their property consisting chiefly in cattle and Negroes.”⁵⁴ When a conservative estimate as to the total number of families within the Choctaw Nation is made, the percent of Choctaw families owning slaves increases to 5.26%⁵⁵ This number represents an increase of over 263%, which is a conservative figure considering the absence of slave owners who stayed in Mississippi.

Surprisingly, the average number of bondsmen owned per owner decreased between 1830 and 1860 from 6.2 to 6.0 slaves per family.⁵⁶ This is partially accounted for by the increase in Choctaws owning only one or two slaves, likely out of necessity or convenience. Historian Greg O’Brien presented a study on masculinity that provides an alternate possible explanation for an increase in small-scale slave ownership in the Choctaw Nation. He claimed that the Choctaw were forced to change their viewpoints on masculinity as they transitioned into the traditionally feminine role of farming. Those who associated new definitions of masculinity with white man’s possessions (such as slavery) aspired to own slaves even if only in small numbers. Those who refused to embrace the feminine task of farming but could not make a sufficient living from hunting required at least one slave to assist with farming.⁵⁷

Naturally, the number of slaves was not equally distributed throughout the territory. A county by county examination demonstrates that the number of slaves and slaves per owner were concentrated to limited areas, normally in the south near the Red River. The Northeast regions

⁵⁴ Grant Foreman, “The California Overland Mail Route through Oklahoma,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 9, no 3 (1931), 306.

⁵⁵ The number of families is not available from the 1867 Choctaw Census. Assuming that the number of individuals in a family did not rapidly change from 1830 to 1860, the 6.7 average per family in 1830 is a reasonable estimate. This is supported by the fact that the population did not replace the approximately 6,000 Choctaw that stayed in Mississippi, but stayed constant.

⁵⁶ US Census, 1860, Schedule 2.

⁵⁷ Greg O’Brien, “Trying to Look like Men: Changing Notions of Masculinity among Choctaw Elites in the Early Republic”, In *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*. Ed. Craig Thompson Friend & Lori Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 135-155.

contained a much lower percentage of slaves, indicating that farms in this region were smaller and possibly for sustenance as opposed to participation in the market economy.

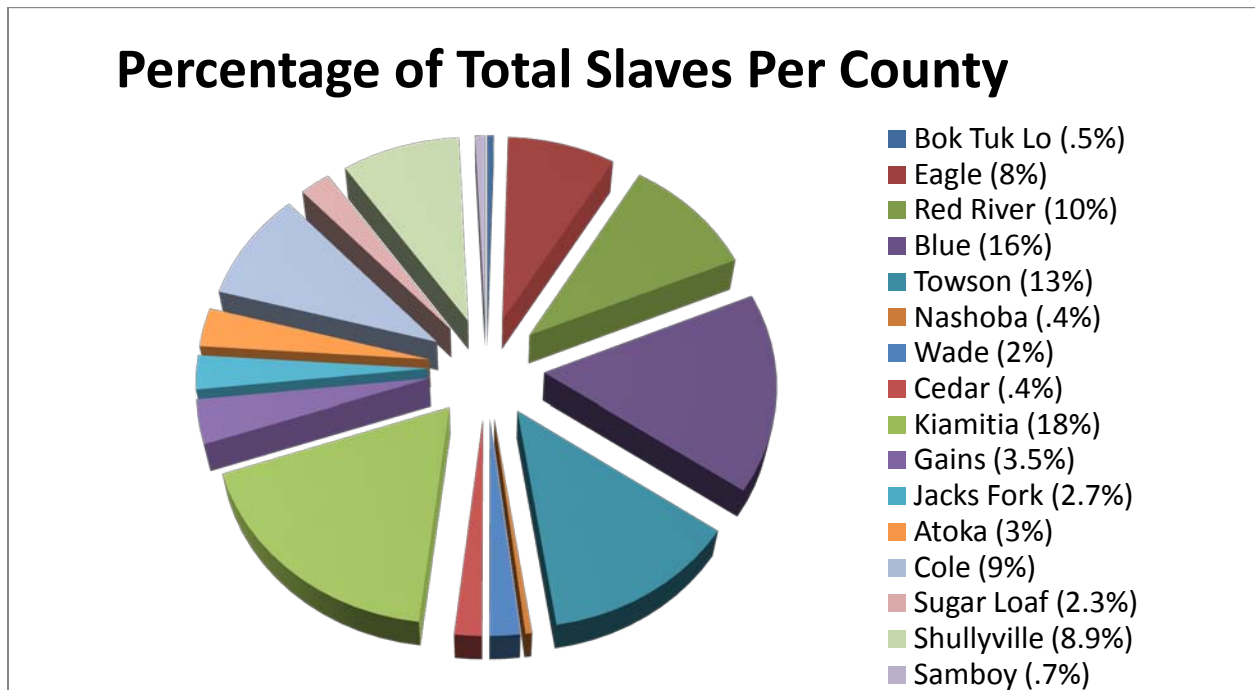


Figure 2: Slaves Per County in Choctaw Territory, 1860

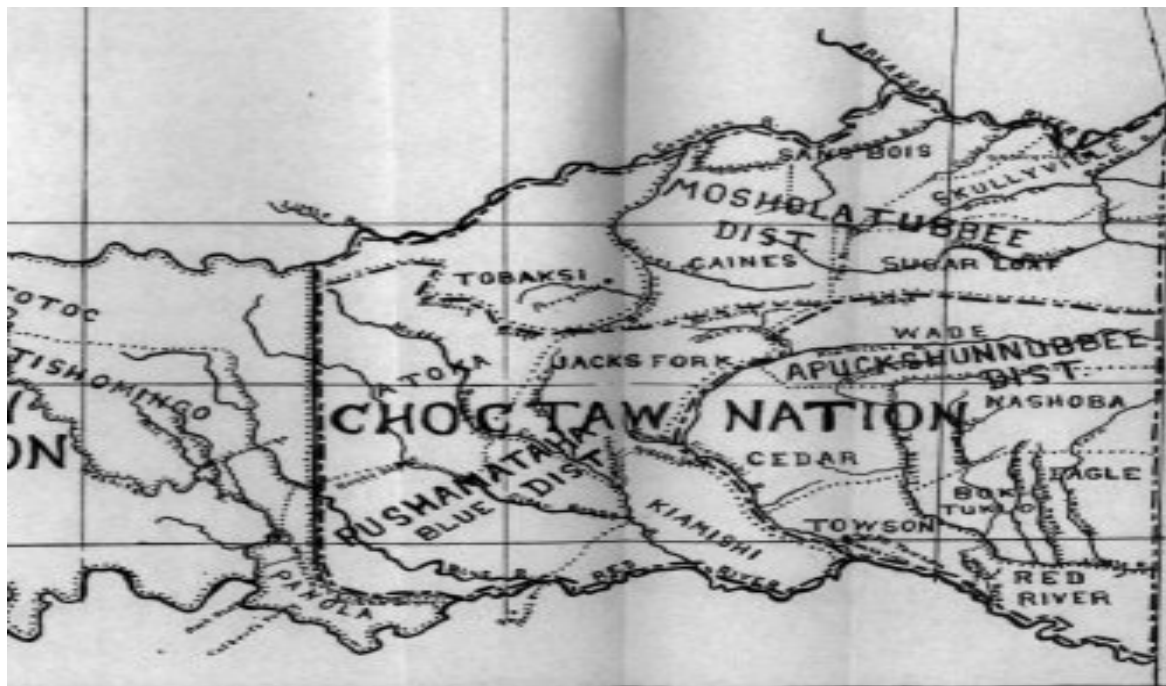


Figure 3: Choctaw County Map⁵⁸

⁵⁸Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol 8, No. 3, September 1930.



Figure 4: Average Number of Slaves per Household by County

Eagle and Red River Counties are clearly outliers in this regional analysis in that the average slave owner held more than twenty slaves. The average for Eagle County is inflated; while half the slave owners in the county had small slaveholdings, the other half held an exceedingly large number of slaves. The tables below illustrate the existence of a wide variance between large and small owners and also indicate that large concentrations of slaves were present in Eagle County. The growth trends in these two counties demonstrate the growth of slavery in the Choctaw Nation in that more slave owners in these two counties had achieved the planter class label than in the entire pre-removal Choctaw Nation.

Slave Owners, Eagle County⁵⁹	Number of Slaves
John James, Willis Cravatt, Mrs. Goins,	1, 1, 1,
George Hudson	2
Peter P. Pitchlynn	81
Calvin Howell	41
William Harris	19
L.G. Harris (deceased)	39

Slave Owners, Red River County		Number of Slaves per Owner		
1-4 slaves	4-10	10-20	20-50	50+
4	1	3	1	2

Table 2: Slaveholders of Diverse Oklahoma Counties

Unfortunately, the 1860 United States census for the Choctaw Nation did not complete the agricultural return (Schedule 4). Limited sources, however, do indicate what was grown by large farmers and in what quantities without this information. An oral history interview of a former slave belonging to Lorenzo (L) G. Harris indicates that Harris used his land and slaves to grow a variety of crops including cabbage, turnips, mustard, kale, beans, peas, sweet potatoes, cotton, and Indian roots as remedies for disease. Harris also had herds of over fifty cattle which were used for milk, cheese, and meat. He grew and raised enough food for his family and slaves, and he also participated in the market economy by selling cotton and other crops in Paris, Texas.⁶⁰ Choctaw slave owners also participated in the market economy by using income from

⁵⁹ US Census, 1860, Schedule 2.

⁶⁰ Interview of Jefferson Cole, *Indian Pioneer Papers*, Oklahoma Historical Society, Vol. 19.

cash crops to purchase what they could not produce. For example, a continuous advertisement for “Negro wollen Caps, Socks, and Shirts, Heavy and light cottonades and Denims, for plantations” appeared in the *Choctaw Intelligencer*. The New Orleans based company sold clothing and blankets, “Madras and mock Madras Handkerchiefs” specifically for slaves. Though these revelations are important in that they established the presence of Choctaw in the market economy of the United States, the lack of specific growth records minimizes its usefulness.⁶¹

Though agricultural statistics were omitted, demographic information regarding gender of slaves is provided in the 1860 United States Census. Consistent with other states, the Choctaws owned almost exactly the same number of male slaves as female slaves—1142 males and 1156 females. This trend held very close to true among the planter class with 466 males and 437 females—a variance of less than one percent. A diverse slave population would potentially give the added benefit of allowing the slave population to reproduce itself. No records exist of slave birth rates among the Choctaws, but the prevalence of both male and female slaves suggests the possibility of the long-term survival of slavery among the Choctaws even if the slave trade was restricted or prohibited.⁶²

The pattern of equal distribution of male and female slaves was not as even among those owning two slaves or fewer. Of this group, 111 slaves were male and 133 slaves were female. The higher percentage of female slaves in this group is partially deceiving in that it could be implied that Choctaws purchased slaves based less upon abilities to assist in agriculture than for other tasks. This argument loses credence when the age of the slaves from this group is examined and cultural considerations are taken into account. By percentage, the two most

⁶¹ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 11, 1850.

⁶² US Census, 1860, Schedule 2.

populous age groups were from 12 to 17 and from 18 to 30; prime age for agricultural work. The fact that a slight majority of these slaves were women is insignificant in that day to day agricultural labor was the role of women in traditional Choctaw culture.⁶³

Classification	Number of Male Slaves	Percent of Total	Number of Female Slaves	Percent of Total
Choctaw Nation	1142	49.7%	1156	50.3%
Planter Class	466	51.6%	437	48.4%
Own less than 3	111	45.5%	133	54.5%

Table 3: Gender Analysis of Choctaw's Slaves⁶⁴

Age Group	Number of Slaves	Percent of Total
Birth - 11	44	18%
12 - 17	50	20%
18 - 30	75	31%
31 - 50	44	18%
51+	31	13%

Table 4: Age Demographics for Slaveholders with Two or Less Slaves

Though it seems self-evident that holding slaves would be profitable for slave owners (or slavery would have died out), the question of profitability has been questioned by some United States historians. Ulrich B. Phillips articulated the most widely used argument in favor of this viewpoint claiming that the cost of purchasing, housing, feeding, and general maintenance often cost more than could be returned from profit.⁶⁵ Revisionist historians such as Kenneth Stampp

⁶³ See table below. Totals were tabulated by hand from US Census returns.

⁶⁴ The Eighth Census of the United States: 1860, Schedule 2.

⁶⁵ Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 391-392.

disputed this claim by noting the sale of cash crops, growth of food crops, and improvements to land offset maintenance costs and regularly turned profits.⁶⁶ In a ground-breaking local study, Randolph B. Campbell determined that Stampf was correct for Harrison County, Texas, and that the profits from slave labor resulted in a respectable profit margin.⁶⁷

Given the unique atmosphere of the Choctaw Nation, the issue of profitability warrants consideration. The method utilized by Campbell for determining profit margin unfortunately can only be applied to slaveholding among the Choctaw Nation by speculating several factors. The formula applied by Campbell for calculating profitability is $R = A + (P(Y) - C)/K$ where A equals the natural percent increase in the slave population, P = the price of cotton, Y = the amount of cotton produced per slave, C = the yearly maintenance cost per slave, and K = the total investment cost per slave.⁶⁸

Beginning with (A), a standard number was set for Harrison County and later all of Texas at 2.15%, as it is impossible to obtain an exact figure on this for any region. The rate of reproduction of slaves in the Choctaw Nation should conceivably mirror Texas, so (A) at 2.15% can be used. The only factor that would conceivably cause discrepancy is that a large percentage of slaves in Eagle County were ten years of age and under. This could represent either that the slave population had reproduced itself at a high rate in a limited time, or that slaves had been purchased at a young age.⁶⁹

For (C), the yearly maintenance cost for each slave was set by Campbell at \$17.50. Numerous factors were included in obtaining this aggregate number, none of which would likely

⁶⁶ Kenneth Stampf, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 380-410.

⁶⁷ Randolph B. Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis: Harrison County Texas, 1850-1880*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983), 60-68.

⁶⁸ Richard Lowe and Randolph B Campbell, *Planters and Plain Folk*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1987), 169.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

vary in Choctaw territory.⁷⁰ One factor that confirms this conclusion is the advertisements placed in the *Choctaw Intelligencer*. The rates charged for slave clothing and blankets appear to be the standard rate for merchandise sent up the Red River.⁷¹ Though these parts of Campbell's equation fit with information available for Choctaw slavery, the remaining variables require a level estimation that renders the conclusion invalid.

In calculating (P), Campbell calculated the price of cotton at eight to nine cents per pound and calculated for both eight and nine cents. Nine cents is typically used for 1860, thus could be used for the Choctaw Nation; however, this rate is significantly lower than Peter Pitchlynn valued the cotton he planned to sell from 1861-1865. In his will, Pitchlynn estimated the value of cotton that he loaned to the Choctaw Nation at 25 cents per pound.⁷² It is unclear if this large discrepancy between Harrison County cotton and Pitchlynn's Choctaw cotton is due to wartime inflation. In the interest of accuracy, profitability would have to be calculated at 9 cents and 25 cents.

Moving forward, the amount of cotton produced per slave (Y) cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy. The only available numbers on production from Pitchlynn's records indicate that he provided the Choctaw people with 62,500 pounds of cotton from 1861 to 1865. It does not indicate if this was Pitchlynn's entire crop or only a part of his total crop; however, it does indicate that Pitchlynn also distributed 25,000 bushels of corn among the Choctaw people. The value of these distributions was \$40,625 according to Pitchlynn's estimate. Pitchlynn managed to avoid going into debt and maintained over eighty slaves, which indicates that even after distributing 62,500 pounds of cotton among his people, he still managed to – at minimum – break even. Though this suggests Pitchlynn profited handily from slavery, without the number of

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 11, 1850.

⁷² Peter P. Pitchlynn. *Will of P. P. Pitchlynn, Choctaw Delegate*. Oklahoma Historical Society, Box 81.13.

acres farmed by Pitchlynn's slaves and the total production numbers, Campbell's formula cannot be incorporated for the Choctaw.⁷³

Traditional methods aside, there are several indicators that suggest that slavery was a profitable investment for the Choctaw. One indicator is that slavery was increasing as slave prices increased. The demand for slaves was high going into the Civil War, and that the Choctaw were not selling their slaves despite the high demand is an indication that there was at least a perceived positive return on investment. As seen in the table below, slave owners in Eagle County had a significant percentage of their investment tied into the future of slavery. An additional commonly cited method of proving profitability is by demonstrating that slaves could be rented out for supplemental income. Available probate records indicate that this practice also took place in the Choctaw Nation. In the case of John McKenny's probate record, ownership of slaves proved to be a form of a life insurance policy. McKenny knew that he was in poor health and specified that upon his death that his "negros shall be hired out for the benefit of my children, before they attain their age."⁷⁴ According to the 1860 Census, once oldest son Thomas McKenny came of age he inherited the slaves for himself. The fact that slaves could be traded, rented, and inherited solidified their prospective profitability among the Choctaw.⁷⁵ Additional proof of slave renting is advertisements in local newspapers. In the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, a week-long add appeared in 1850 for "a good, trusty black man for one year."⁷⁶ This further demonstrates that a demand did exist for temporary slave labor adding an additional element of profitability.

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ John McKenny, *Will of John McKenny*, Oklahoma History Center, Box 81.21.

⁷⁵ US Census, 1860, Schedule 2.

⁷⁶ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, October 20, 1850.

Slave Owner	Birth to 10	11 to 17	18 to 30 male	18-50 female and 30-50 male	Above 50
Pitchlynn, Peter	37 (45.6%)	12 (16.0%)	10 (12.3%)	18 (22.2 %)	4 (4.9%)
Howell, Calvin H	20 (48.8 %)	2 (4.9 %)	9 (21.9 %)	9 (22%)	1 (2.5%)
Harris, William R.	9 (50%)	3 (15.8%)	1 (5.3%)	4 (21%)	2 (10.6%)
Harris, L.G.	16 (41%)	5 (12.8%)	5 (12.8%)	12 (30.8%)	1 (2.5%)

Table 5: Slave Age Statistics in Eagle County (owners of 3 or more slaves)⁷⁷

Although the Choctaws did not practice slavery at the levels of neighboring southern states, quantitative analysis reveals that slavery not only existed, but was growing and expanding at a high rate. An increase of over 460 percent in a total number of slaves in a thirty year period as well as significant investment in the future of slavery gives validity to the argument that the Choctaws resembled a southern state. It is reasonable to assume that had the Civil War not taken place, the Choctaw Nation would have been a mirror of the South. The existence of racial slavery, even in low numbers, raises questions regarding Akers' argument dismissing race as a part of Choctaw society. Further discovery and analysis of farming records will be needed to positively prove profitability, but with the conceived notion of profitability and an expanding planter class the future for slavery was bright in the pre-Civil War Choctaw Nation.

⁷⁷ US Census, 1860, Schedule 2.

CHAPTER 4

CONSEQUENCES OF GROWTH, MISSIONARIES, AND BURNING

The merits of quantifiable data and analysis are clear; however, numbers alone fail to provide a complete profile of the effect of slavery in the societal evolution and transition of the post-removal Choctaw Nation. It is necessary to examine journal records, correspondence, and written accounts to understand the effects of slavery, resistance to the growth of slavery, and the opinions of the Choctaws in general. An examination of the laws passed by the Choctaw Nation that relating to slavery provides additional insight. These include both laws that limited the actions of slaves and laws that did not. Second, an inspection of the writing of native Choctaws and foreign-born missionaries provides insight into the attitudes of the Choctaws toward the spread of slavery. Finally, as laws and writings can often be symbolic without action, an analysis of a horrific slave-burning incident provides insight regarding those directly involved and the responses of those not involved.

Despite a written constitution, no reference was made to slaves in pre-removal Choctaw laws. It is likely that slaves did not constitute a large enough percentage of the Choctaw's population to merit codified restrictions. The first Choctaw laws related to slavery appeared in October 1836 with the passage of a law banning "the most fatal and destructive doctrine of abolitionism" within the Choctaw Nation. The punishment for anyone found guilty of this offense was permanent expulsion from the Choctaw Nation. This law clearly represented a concern shared by southern neighbors that an abolitionist presence could lead to a slave rebellion. There are several indications that this law was both enforced and unenforced depending on circumstance. For example, correspondence from one missionary to her mother reported "very regular" access to evangelist newspapers that featured "Beacher's" sermons. It

was implied that the “Beacher” in question was Henry Ward Beecher of Kansas-Nebraska fame. However, contrary to this missionary’s experience, other missionaries from the same mission expressed constant apprehension and fear of publically declaring abolitionist sentiment due to this law.⁷⁸

On the same day in 1836, the Choctaw Council passed a law regarding marriage in the Choctaw Nation. The primary purpose of the law was to prohibit marriage within the same “iksa” or clan, a traditional practice that was often marrying within the same bloodlines. The law pertained to slaves in that the law declared “all persons...are left to make their own decision as to whom they shall marry” with no direct prohibition of slave marriages. It is unclear whether a slave met the qualification as “persons,” but as Choctaws fit the parameter of “person” they likely could chose to marry a slave. The ambiguity of this law did not continue for long as future marriage laws were specific to race. For instance, an 1849 marriage law required all unmarried white men living with an Indian woman to lawfully marry her or forever leave the nation. Though this law did not say that marrying a slave was illegal, an 1850 newspaper account entitled “Love Versus Slavery” offered some clarification on the issue. In the story, an old man gave freedom papers to a slave that he desired to marry. The man attempted to repossess her as a slave after she rejected his proposal of marriage. This article indirectly demonstrates that freedom was a *de facto* prerequisite to marrying a black person.⁷⁹

The Choctaws also made it clear through their several constitutions that free black men were not welcome to reside in the Choctaw Nation, and slaves already in the nation were to

⁷⁸ A.R. Durant, *Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation: Together with the Treaties of 1855, 1865, and 1866* (New York: Wm. B. Lyon and Son, Printers and Publishers, 1869), 38; Mrs. Lee to Mother, October 20, 1859, Box 2, Folder 9, Colonel Dawes Collection, 2; Cyrus Kingsbury to Board, May 1846, Box 3, Folder 42, Cyrus Kingsbury Collection.

⁷⁹ Durant, *Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation*, 72; *Choctaw Intelligencer*, October 16, 1850; Paul Bonfield, “The Choctaw Nation on the Eve of the Civil War”, *Journal of the West*, 12 (1973), 391. The Choctaw Courts ruled that the former slave was to remain free.

remain in that status of servitude. In 1838, the newly passed constitution specified that “any free negro, or any part negro, unconnected with Choctaw and Chickasaw blood, shall be prohibited to come and settle in the Choctaw nation.” This provision was repeated in subsequent constitutions, normally with harsher specifications. A law enacted in 1844 under a later constitution prevented any “free negroes” from ever gathering any money from the Choctaw annuities. This provision seems somewhat redundant as free black people were not allowed to live in the Choctaw Nation without explicit approval of the Choctaw Council. A provision in the Constitution of 1842 closed loopholes of this nature by specifying that the Council may vote to accept outsiders into the Nation, except “negros or descendents of negros.” This law was multifaceted in that it prevented freed slaves residing outside Choctaw territory from entering Choctaw territory, runaways from fleeing to Choctaw territory under the auspices of freedom, and that emancipated slaves would be forced to leave. Enforcement of this law is apparent in the 1860 United States Census where several “slaves” had voluntarily signed lifelong contracts so that they could stay in the Nation.⁸⁰ Two corollaries to these laws included specifications for punishment of those who violated the laws and assisted freed slaves that encroached on Choctaw land. Any Choctaws that assisted freed slaves could be fined or receive fifty lashes on the back. Freed slaves that attempted to stay in the Choctaw Nation would be sold back into slavery.⁸¹

As the Civil War approached, the Choctaws passed the most restrictive laws regarding slaves including the prohibition of teaching slaves to read, write, or sing hymns. These laws were specifically troublesome for missionaries that were attempting to convince Northern-based contributors of the minimum attachment Choctaws held to slaveholding. Missionaries’ correspondence with outsiders confirms the enforcement of the literacy prohibition. One such

⁸⁰ Durant, *Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation: Together with the Treaties of 1855, 1865, and 1866* (New York: Wm. B. Lyon and Son, Printers and Publishers, 1869), 40-60; U.S. Census, Schedule 2, 1860.

⁸¹ Bonnifield, “The Choctaw Nation”, 392.

instance involved a missionary complaining that when one of the slaves was sent to pick up mail, he or she grabbed everything “for none of them can read and they cant tell if it is right or wrong.” She described this practice as “one of the evils of slavery that their owners will not allow them to be taught to read.” Not surprisingly, no protection for slaves appeared in any laws passed by the Choctaw Council. This flaw was noted by a missionary when he claimed “What is wanting is a wise and efficient protection for the slave.” Missionaries like Kingsbury had spent decades with the Choctaws and played a critical role in the development of Choctaw slavery—based on this experience, he understood that a law of this nature would not likely be passed.⁸²

Conversions to Christianity did slowly take place as missionaries served both as primary teachers and spiritual guides, adding an additional element of change to the lives of the Choctaws. Prior to the American Revolution, attempts were made to convert the Choctaws from their traditional polytheistic religious views to Christianity. British reverend Samuel Harte attempted to explain the concept of one, almighty God to the Choctaws in 1765. Following a sermon, a chief “took Mr. Harte by the hand, with one of his, and filling out a glass of rum with the other, concluded with saying ‘Beloved Man, I will always think well of this friend of ours God Almighty who you tell me so much of, and so let us drink to his health.’” Though polite, in reality the rum had far more impact on the Choctaws than early attempts at conversion. The Choctaws did, however, have an interest in receiving missionaries as a means of gaining a Western education “so that they could deal with the forces infringing on their lives.” They also recognized education as a means for future generations to be more able to deal with the market economy and encroaching white culture.⁸³

⁸² Durant, *Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation: Together with the Treaties of 1855, 1865, and 1866*, 47; Mrs. Lee to Mother, December, 25, 1859, Box 2, Folder 16, Colonel Dawes Collection; Cyrus Kingsbury to Brother, December 1865, Box 1, Folder 7, *Cyrus Kingsbury Collection*.

⁸³ Greg O’Brien, *Choctaws in the Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) responded to the Choctaw's requests for "the white man's book" by sending a young and passionate missionary named Cyrus Kingsbury in the spring of 1818. Kingsbury quickly learned the Choctaw language, and devoted his life to working towards the advancement, preservation, and conversion of the Choctaw people. According to Kingsbury, he and other missionaries "came to the Choctaws to labor for their conversion and to make our graves with them." He established Elliot Mission in 1818 with funding from the ABCFM and later was appropriated \$6,000 annually from the Choctaw Nation once the mission had started to succeed. He abandoned the mission and chose to emigrate with the Choctaws following their removal from Mississippi, and established Pine Ridge Mission in 1836.⁸⁴

The change in location from Mississippi to modern Oklahoma created many hardships, but arguably most troublesome was the issue of obtaining a sufficient source of free labor. The abundant sources of free labor in Mississippi (based upon the proximity to the United States) allowed Kingsbury and the New England based ABCFM to avoid obtaining slaves for their missions, but this was not the case in post-removal territory. Forced to choose between acquiring slaves or forfeiting his mission, Kingsbury chose slave labor. This choice created controversy and placed Kingsbury in the difficult position of trying to appease both abolitionists in the North who supported the ABCFM, and slaveholding Choctaws in the Choctaw Nation who attended his church, provided annuities to support the mission, and vehemently defended slavery.

Initially, Kingsbury was able to balance both sides, openly keeping "marginal" slaves but

2002), 8; Joel Spring, *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family and Its Tribe, 1763-1995* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1996), 36-37; Donna Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation 1830-1860* (East Lansing: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 105, Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1819* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), xiv.

⁸⁴ Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries*, 61; Cyrus Kingsbury to Board, May 1846, Box 5, Folder 3, Cyrus Kingsbury Collection; Arthur DeRosier, Jr, "Pioneers with Conflicting Ideals: Christianity and Slavery in the Choctaw Nation," *The Journal of Mississippi History* (21), no. 3, (July 1959): 174-189.

assuring the ABCFM that it was a necessity in the absence of a free labor supply. In a semi-annual report to the ABCFM, Kingsbury noted that “at this late period, we with the committee, are pressed with peculiar and complicated difficulties on the subject of slavery. We wish you to feel assured that we have no personal attachments to the institution.” As proof of his abolitionist sentiment, Kingsbury offered “that before leaving Mississippi, the agency of one of the brethren of this mission was solicited by a highly respectable planter of that state, to aid in securing the emancipation of more than twenty slaves, who in compliance with their own wishes, were liberated and sent to Liberia.” As further assurance, Kingsbury claimed to “regard slavery as a tremendous evil; one which casts a dark and ominous shadow over the future prospects of this people.”⁸⁵ With the claim of a resounding abolitionist sentiment, Kingsbury justified his slaveholding as “a matter of necessity” and stated that “gladly would we have avoided the hiring of slaves, could we have obtained other suitable help.” Kingsbury also included a chart noting the number of slaveholders that had converted to Christianity silently implying that excluding slaveholders from the church would decimate conversions.⁸⁶

The ABCFM responded to Kingsbury’s 1846 report conceding that “while neither the board nor the committees deem it advisable to give you or your brethren instructions relating to the having of slavery on your missionary operations, believe that your own good judgment... and your daily observation of the wickedness and the disastrous influences of the slave system, will be your best guide.” While they made this concession, the board also emphasized a “desire, of course, that you should do whatever you can, as discreet Christian men, and missionaries of the lord Jesus, to give the Indians correct views on the subject.” To the board, the appropriate course of action “would be to induce them to take measures as speedily as possible to bring this system

⁸⁵ Cyrus Kingsbury to Board, May 1846, Box 3, Folder #42, *The Cyrus Kingsbury Collection*.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* See attached “Appendix A”. Facsimile copy of original, located in Cyrus Kingsbury to Board, May 1846, Box 3, Folder #42.

of wrong and oppression to the end” while still maintaining needed labor at the mission.⁸⁷

This response initially appears somewhat reminiscent of Thomas Jefferson’s position on slavery, a necessary evil to be ended, but not until a practical solution can be found. To avoid the appearance of endorsing this viewpoint, the ABCFM acted cautiously in its acquiescence to make the point that Kingsbury would not have a *carte blanche* with owning slaves, but rather that for the moment an alternative viable solution could not be obtained. They finished their 1846 letter by proclaiming that “[i]t seems to us, also, that preachers of the gospel and enlightened Christian men of every class, living and acting in a slaveholding community, should regard it as a point settled, that slavery and gospel institutions cannot permanently exist in friendly contact, side by side; that the gospel, if held up in its purity and divine energy, must mitigate, and at no distant day, remove slavery, especially in this land.” The message to Kingsbury was clear: despite living amongst slaveholders, it would be necessary to use the power of the gospel to work toward ending slavery among the Choctaws.⁸⁸

Through a series of further messages, the ABCFM continued to pressure Kingsbury and other missionaries to increase their efforts to rid both themselves and the Choctaw Nation of the evils of slavery. Kingsbury responded to the added pressure with a defense that represented the mindset of slaveholding clergy in the Choctaw Nation. Many tenets of the arguments could be used by slaveholding and abolitionist clergy in the American South and North to defend their viewpoints. Kingsbury first noted that the ABCFM had laid down two specific qualifications for allowing individuals into church membership: “1st ‘The ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper cannot be scriptuously and rightfully denied to those who give credible evidence of piety.’ 2nd ‘The missionaries, in connection with the churches which they have gathered, are to

⁸⁷ Board to Cyrus Kingsbury, November 19, 1846, Box 5, Folder 3, *The Cyrus Kingsbury Collection*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*; Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1964), 264.

be the sole judges of the sufficiency of this evidence.” As slaveholders could easily meet these qualifications, Kingsbury argued that he did not have the right to turn away slaveholders from the church. Thus, the only real weapon that he could feasibly wield against slaveholders was to preach sermons on the horrors of slavery. Kingsbury also noted that the bulk of his congregation and congregations throughout the Choctaw and Cherokee Nations consisted primarily of slaveholders and slaves.⁸⁹

In a continuing effort to cautiously justify his actions, Kingsbury assured the board that progress had been made both personally and by the Choctaws towards manumitting slaves. As evidence, Kingsbury noted that he had manumitted three slaves since arriving in Oklahoma, two of “whom I have liberated, are so far advanced in life, as not to be greatly coveted by those who wish to have slaves. The other, a valuable man, I advised to go to the Cherokee nation, soon after he obtained his freedom, where he remained ever since, in the service of the Dwight Mission.” He recommenced by noting that the majority of Choctaws had no interest in slavery, but “the influence of these few is great in the councils of the nations.”⁹⁰

Kingsbury’s objective in citing these examples clearly was to note that the abolitionist sentiments he exclaimed were more than platitudes to appease the ABCFM, and that he was making an earnest effort to reduce slavery amongst the Choctaws. Also, it was an attempt to convince the board that his efforts were succeeding and only inhibited by the powerful Choctaw elite. The advice to leave the Choctaw Nation he gave to the valuable freed slave could indicate an acknowledgement that the laws regarding expulsion of freed slaves, especially one of value, would be enforced in Choctaw territory. This was habitual advice for Kingsbury who purchased the freedom of a “pious” slave named Simon and arranged for his transportation to Africa as a

⁸⁹ Cyrus Kingsbury to Board, November 19, 1846, Box 5, folder 3, *The Cyrus Kingsbury Collection*.

⁹⁰ Ibid

missionary in 1853.⁹¹

Kingsbury continued his argument incorporating a slightly different strategy by pointing out the hypocrisy of those arguing against slavery that yet refused to take actions or make sacrifices themselves to end the institution. He articulated this perspective by saying that “with the intense interest prevailing in the free states, in England, and we may say throughout the civilized world... we see no prevailing disposition to lay an embargo on the products of slave labor, the cotton.” This specific argument was particularly brilliant in that it did not defend the institution of slavery as acceptable, but rather provided a course of action that the ABCFM, Northern states, and all abolitionists worldwide could take if their commitment toward ending slavery matched the initiative and sacrifice they demanded of others.⁹²

Though these arguments temporarily appeased the ABCFM, Kingsbury was also forced to pacify prominent Choctaws who had the legal right to expel any abolitionist from the Choctaw Nation. Additionally, Kingsbury knew that funding for his and other missions came from both the Choctaw Nation and the ABCFM. Thus, if slaveholding Choctaws detected abolitionist sentiment from missionaries, the funding might be revoked. The only way to accomplish the task of placating the Choctaw elite while satisfying the requirements of the ABCFM was to keep abolitionist fervor private and not the focus of teachings. In theory, as long as the Choctaws and the ABCFM believed that the missionaries fulfilled obligations regarding slavery, Kingsbury could operate his mission with the needed support of both.

Conflict between abolitionist and pro-slavery sentiments was inevitable despite Kingsbury’s best attempts to bestride both sides. The first major conflict came in response to the 1853 law prohibiting the education of slaves and children of slaves. Similar laws of this nature

⁹¹ Cyrus Kingsbury, “The Journal of Cyrus Kingsbury,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, vol. 3, no.2, September 6, 1853. The purchase of Simon and his family was made for the sum of \$700.00.

⁹² Cyrus Kingsbury to Board, May 1846, Box 5, Folder 3, *The Cyrus Kingsbury Collection*.

had been passed before and potentially had no effect on missionaries as there were no black students in missionary schools; however, the passage of laws controlling the actions of slaves was hardly seen as an indicator of abolitionist sentiment that the ABCFM aspired to instill. The ABCFM forced the missionaries to respond which they did one year later under the direction of Cyrus Kingsbury and Cyrus Byington. The ten-item resolution stated a clear intent to avoid any direct confrontation with the Choctaw government on the issues of education of slaves or slavery in general. They claimed that education of slaves was a political question and missionaries have “nothing to do with political questions and agitations.” The resolution continued with a comparison of slaveholders to soldiers in war, claiming “there can be no shedding of blood without sin somewhere attached, and yet the individual soldier may not be guilty of it; so while slavery is always sinful, we cannot esteem everyone who is legally a slaveholder a wrongdoer for sustaining the legal relation.” The ABCFM sent board member George Wood to investigate the situation first hand and concluded that the missionaries were making progress and should be allowed to continue their work. Despite the report, the ABCFM removed funding for missions amongst the Choctaws four years later. Luckily for Kingsbury and other missionaries, the Presbyterian Board for Foreign Missions (PBFM) agreed to replace the funding that had been lost in response to the slavery debate.⁹³

In the process of maintaining a moderate position on slaveholding to pacifying the Choctaw government and utilizing slave labor at missions, the missionaries sent the message that there was no clear dichotomy between slaveholding and Christianity. This issue was one that sectionally divided major religious denominations with Southern branches proclaiming biblical endorsement of slaveholding. Thus, the work of missionaries in the Choctaw Nation, despite

⁹³ Joel Spring, *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family and Its Tribe, 1763-1995* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1996), 156-159; William McLoughlin, “The Choctaw Slave Burning: A Crisis in Mission Work Among the Indians”, *Journal of the West* (no 13), 1974, 114-115.

their northern roots, advanced the transition of the Choctaws into a slaveholding nation that resembled a southern state.

Arguments advanced by missionaries that in spite of the sin of slavery, slaveholders who humanely kept bondsmen should not be chastised led to the implication that those who inhumanely practiced slavery should have actions taken against them. This proved not to be the case after a slave was burned at the stake by a member of Cyrus Byington's church. The burning happened in response to the December 1858 murder of Richard Harkins, a prominent Choctaw leader and brother to chief George Harkins. According to several accounts, Richard Harkins had disappeared one morning and was last seen riding his horse toward a ford of a river. His horse was later found several miles from the river, indicating that Harkins might have drowned. A slave named Prince was "questioned" and likely tortured regarding the disappearance of Richard Harkins. Prince confessed that he had murdered Harkins, tied his body to a large rock, and thrown it in the river. He then led a group to the place where he had left Harkins' body. Once the body had been discovered, Prince allegedly implicated a female slave named Lucy in planning the murder, then drowned himself by jumping in the river. A mother of eight and also a member of Byington's church, Lucy asserted innocence to her last breath. She was burned alive at the insistence of Richard's widow Lavina despite pleas of blamelessness and questionable evidence.⁹⁴

Perhaps most critical to understanding and analyzing the Choctaw Slave Burning are the facts that the incident went unreported for a year and Lavina Harkins was allowed to keep her church membership and standing in the community. The story only reached the public in May 1860 after a disgruntled missionary, Jason D. Chamberlain, wrote an account of the event in retaliation for dismissal from his position. The Presbyterian Church had been warned that

⁹⁴ McLoughlin, "The Choctaw Slave Burning", 113-119; Akers, *Living in the Land of Death*, 140.

Chamberlin threatened to expose a terrible secret that could lead to the destruction of their missions, but informed only that “it was a terrible affair, but the mission and the church here are no more responsible for it than the Presbyterian Church is for the John Brown Affair.”

Chamberlin addressed his account to Professor Samuel C. Bartlett of the Chicago Theological Seminary, who then forwarded the account to representatives at the ABCFM and PBFM. Both organizations denied any responsibility in the incident, with the ABCFM claiming that they had severed ties with the mission prior to the incident and could not “take any ex-post facto action”, while the PBFM claimed that the incident occurred prior to establishing ties with the mission.⁹⁵

Bartlett forwarded the correspondence from all parties to a Chicago newspaper called *The Independent* in December 1860, which launched a series of articles that revealed opinions on slavery from those both inside and outside of Choctaw territory. *The Independent* admitted that additional information was needed and that the account had not been confirmed, but could not avoid wondering why the event had gone unpublished by the missionaries, why no discipline had been given to church members involved, and how many other times incidents like this had taken place without being reported. The first reply came in the form of two anonymous letters published in *The Congregationalist* allegedly from a person claiming to have lived in mission for five years. She claimed the “whole affair was conducted by a lawless mob” that was so powerful the Choctaw authorities could not deter it even if they had wanted. The letter concluded by noting that the incident, though deplorable, was exceptional and should not be justification for actions that hindered conversion to Christianity. This first letter is reminiscent of a typical defense of slavery in the face of horrible abuses—that the abuses were deplorable, but rare and not characteristic of the system.⁹⁶

⁹⁵McLoughlin, “The Choctaw Slave Burning”, 116-121.

⁹⁶Ibid, 120-122.

The second anonymous letter was significantly longer in length and made no attempt to defend or address slaveholding, but rather defended the response of the missionaries and community involved. The letter was well organized and asked and answered four rhetorical questions regarding what action Mr. Bartlett would have preferred had been taken: Should those involved had been disciplined, should any member of the church have instituted a legal process against those involved, should the church or any members had publically denounced the sin of what happened, and should Mr. Bartlett have published this event to the world? Proceeding chronologically, the author of the letter answered the questions beginning with the claim that Mrs. Harkins had already been disciplined when she “voluntarily gave herself up to the discipline of the church, made all the confession which the most fastidious could desire, (and) was restored to fellowship.” A panel to examine penitence did fit the aforementioned guidelines for church membership passed by the ABCFM, giving some credence to this argument. In answering the second question, the author claimed that any legal proceedings against the families involved would be “simply ridiculous.” The Pitchlynn and Harkins families were rather prominent and held high ranking positions, making this argument within the realm of feasibility. Third, the author paralleled the act of denouncing slavery within the Choctaw Nation with “preach(ing) a sermon against the supremacy of the Pope beneath the walls of the Vatican.” This response revealed that the author believed slavery to be thought of in high regard, or at very least heavily defended, in the Choctaw Nation. In answering the final rhetorical question, the author argued that there was no need for Christians, missionaries, or Choctaw citizens to publically report the incident to the outside world “as so many men in the North (are) ready and willing to save us the trouble.” This position was clarified in the following passage:

The action of Northern men, of a certain class, in respect to the Choctaw Mission, often reminds me of a flock of turkey buzzards. You know with what indifference they flap

their lazy wings over the most beautiful landscape. The purling stream, the waving trees, the blooming flowers, have no attraction for them. But show them a dead carcass, and they pounce upon it at once. So certain Northern men can see nothing of the *good* that has been effected here by the Mission. They take on their purse strings and look with cool indifference upon the members we have educated, the general good that has been effected through our labor. But show them one dead negro...and they are all down upon us at once.

The accusation of being a “turkey buzzard” for inquiring about something as implicitly trivial as “one dead negro” warranted a rebuttal from Bartlett. He questioned whether a simple confession was sufficient justification to restore a church member for murder, and whether the murder of Christian slaves by Christian masters was “too trivial or too common an affair in the Choctaw nation” as to justify investigation.⁹⁷

A missionary named Elizabeth “Lizzie” Lee made an additional reference to the slave burning incident. The reference appeared in the closing section of a letter to her mother in response to the initial report of the incident published in *The Independent*. Though she alleged to have known nothing about the incident prior to the article, she asserted that Mrs. Harkins “was rather passively connected” with the burning and “is sincerely penitent.” Mrs. Lee oddly did not use this occasion to mention the evils of slavery, something that she readily had on previous occasions.⁹⁸

Contemporary historians disagree on the implications of the Choctaw Slave Burning with regards to the institution of slavery and the status of Choctaw society. Historian William McLoughlin argues that the incident reveals that Native Americans had accepted all aspects of southern slavery despite the benign nature of aboriginal slavery and the number of slaves that had been adopted into tribes. McLoughlin attributed this change to an active desire by the Native Americans “to maintain a social status above that of Negroes.” Joel Spring seemingly

⁹⁷ Ibid, 118, 124-126.

⁹⁸ Mrs. Lee to Mother, January 1, 1861, Box 2, Folder 55, *The Colonel Dawes Collection*.

agreed with this standpoint, but furthered the argument by attributing post-Civil War racism to antebellum slaveholding. Clara Sue Kidwell agrees that the incident as well as the response from all parties signifies a substantial shift in Choctaw culture and the involvement of Choctaws in the American dilemma of slaveholding. Most relevant to the slave burning incident, Kidwell claims that the response indicates an acceptance of southern viewpoints toward slavery.⁹⁹

Native Choctaw and historian Donna Akers offers an entirely opposite interpretation of the slave burning incident and response. Akers claims that incident reveals the racism of white Americans toward Native Americans. She defends this viewpoint by the assertion that the white Americans that responded to the incident implied an assumption “that native people were to be taught by the superior culture of the whites how to be civilized” and that “in emulating their superior white brothers, (Choctaws) had the temerity to think of themselves as on the same level as whites.” Akers continues with the rant that “the shrill cries of outrage over the Choctaw incident from Americans in the North suggests that racism overrode moral arguments against slavery in animating American public opinion.” Apparently racism in the American North had reached the level that “slavery was bad; American Indians practicing slavery was intolerable.” Despite the incident, Akers claims that Choctaws practiced a mild form of slavery that should be considered vassalage—no doubt Prince and Lucy would have disagreed.¹⁰⁰

There are numerous historical and logical obstructions with virtually all of Akers’s conclusions regarding this incident. First and foremost, to suggest that abolitionists were driven primarily by racism in their adamant condemnation of a slave burning could only be defended if the same abolitionists were indifferent to atrocities against slaves in the South. The response to publications such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* refutes the idea that indifference towards American

⁹⁹ McLoughlin, “The Choctaw Slave Burning”, 126; Spring, *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family*, 38; Kidwell, *The Choctaws in Oklahoma*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Donna Akers, *Living in the Land of Death*, 138-141.

slavery existed in the North. Any additional fervor in condemnation of Choctaw slaveholding could also be explained by the fact that abolitionists had a larger probability to exert influence towards reducing slavery in a Native American nation than a southern state. Also, the doctrine of containing the spread of slavery was prevalent at the time of the slave burning incident, indicating that those who tolerated the southern slavery would oppose Native American nations holding slaves. Finally, Akers complete lack of citation raises a question as to the sources of her conclusions.

Despite undefended conclusions, Akers does add to the discussion on the slave burning incident with a more detailed, cited account of the slave burning incident. Akers notes that there were many Choctaws present at the burning of Prince's body and Lucy on a pyre, "having traveled from far and wide" with the attraction of an execution. The added details of burning Prince's dead body and crowds traveling far distances parallels the post-Civil War activity of southern lynchings of African Americans. This could indicate that the roots of mob violence in response to allegations of crimes by African Americans might lie in the antebellum Choctaw Nation. An examination of lynching in the post-Civil War Choctaw Nation is necessary to corroborate or refute this assertion.

CHAPTER 5

CIVIL WAR AND ABOLITION

It is well-documented that the American Civil War affected countries outside the United States and had significant implications for the institution of slavery. Restrictions of the cotton supply affected manufacturing economies like Great Britain and others across the Atlantic Ocean. The abolition of slavery in America was also a catalyst for the end of slavery in Brazil. Historian Robert Conrad explained that “The...war in the United States...reverberated in the [Brazilian] Empire like an immense and frightful thunderclap; it was the voice of God speaking through the mouth of cannons.” It is reasonable to assume that the same impacts of the Civil War affected the economy and institutions of the geographically connected Choctaw nation. Moreover, the Choctaws differed from these other nations in more than just proximity to the conflict as they actively participated in the conflict both with formal treaties and combat regiments. Effects of their participation in the conflict mirrored the Confederate States in many aspects. These included the abolition of slavery and attempts at establishing rights for freedmen. This chapter outlines events leading up to and during the Civil War from a Choctaw perspective and examines the resulting effects on the institution of slavery.¹⁰¹

The chronology of Choctaw involvement in the Civil War requires outlining in order to understand the role of slavery in their actions. Slaveholding states concerned with a perceived rise in abolitionism began meeting together in 1860. Choctaws and other slaveholding Indian nations had not been included in these discussions despite having “a common interest in the institution of slavery” and the fact that they “would be common sufferers in its overthrow.” The United States Government was obligated to protect the Choctaws, but federal troops abandoned

¹⁰¹ Robert Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850-1888* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 70.

Fort Cobb, Fort Arbuckle, and Fort Washita in 1861 which left the Choctaws and other Indian nations without any defense. The Confederacy seized the initiative and sent Albert Pike and Douglas Cooper to negotiate an alliance with the Choctaws and other Indian Nations. Official command of the mission was given to Pike who opted to bring Cooper along due to his prestigious reputation among the Choctaws as a fair agent. The meeting was widely publicized, with one resident noting in a letter that “a special session of the Choctaw council is called for next week” and editorializing that “*the cloud is dark, very dark.*”¹⁰²

The Choctaw Council responded by first declaring the Choctaw Nation to be independent of the United States and two weeks later agreeing to a treaty with the Confederacy. Favorable conditions in the formal alliance included the continuation of payments by the Confederacy to the Choctaws for annuities owed by the United States, a guarantee of internal sovereignty, and the assurance that Confederate statehood would be offered. This represented the first time that the Choctaw Nation had ever formally opposed the United States.¹⁰³

Despite Cooper’s claim to be able to field 10,000 Choctaw and Chickasaw warriors, fewer than 1,300 Choctaws initially enlisted and took part in very few battles. An unknown number of Choctaws chose to remain pro-union and enlisted in the Union Army. The most notable battle involving Confederate Choctaw forces was The Battle of Pea Ridge. Choctaw warriors took five days longer than expected to mobilize. Once they had arrived, Choctaws and Chickasaws under Confederate General Douglas Cooper never received orders to advance and consequently remained in the rear as the Confederates were defeated. After Pea Ridge, the Battle of Honey Springs, the largest fought in Indian Territory, ended Confederate control of any

¹⁰² Clara Sue Kidwell, *The Choctaws in Oklahoma: From Tribe to Nation, 1855-1970* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 77-82; Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860*, 128-130; Lizzie Lee to Mother, March 1861, Box 2, Folder 57, *Colonel Dawes Collection; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), Series IV, I, 30.

¹⁰³ Kidwell, *The Choctaws in Oklahoma*, 78.

Choctaw lands. The leaders of the “Five Civilized Tribes” agreed in 1864 that they would make peace with the Union as independent nations and not part of the Confederacy. Peter Pitchlynn, acting as Principal Chief, signed an official surrender for the Choctaws on June 19, 1865, which led to a peace treaty in 1866.¹⁰⁴

Considering the tradition of peace and financial attachments between the United States and the Choctaws, it appears somewhat peculiar that the Choctaws chose to join the Confederacy. Primary participants and revisionist historians have attempted to delineate causes that brought the Choctaws into the Civil War all of these attempts involve slavery to some degree. Three causes emerge from both primary and revisionist accounts: the presence of and reliance upon slavery inevitably drew the Choctaws towards the Confederacy, the action and inaction of missionaries, and an inability to remain neutral in the conflict.

The Choctaw’s attachment to slaveholding is the most commonly cited justification for an alliance with the Confederacy; however, close examination reveals flaws in this argument. Significant capital investment in the future of slaveholding, as seen in chapter two, did exist in the Choctaw Nation and certainly influenced slaveholding Choctaws. Robert M. Jones, the largest slave owner in the Choctaw Nation, vehemently objected to initial attempts at neutrality by the Choctaw Council. He claimed that the Choctaws were obligated to join with Confederate forces out of mutual interest and past violations committed by the United States against the Choctaw Nation. There can be little dispute that a belief in the right to hold slaves was a part of the antebellum southern identity.

Donna Akers countered the claim that slavery was an influential factor by noting that the majority of Choctaws owned no slaves and had no interest in fighting to defend the institution.

¹⁰⁴ Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 88-92; Paul Bonnifield, “The Choctaw Nation on the Eve of the Civil War”, *Journal of the West*, 12 (1973), 390.

Akers's claim is hardly conclusive when it is noted that no Confederate State had a majority of slaveholders, yet all decided to secede out of a need to defend this institution. A stronger counter that has not yet been made by historians is examining Peter Pitchlynn and his desire to remain neutral. Pitchlynn had a large plantation and wealth built totally upon slave labor, yet decided to oppose an alliance with the Confederacy. If attachment to slavery was the primary factor for a Choctaw alliance, Pitchlynn, a planter-class slaveholder with legitimate grievances against the United States should have given enthusiastic endorsement.¹⁰⁵

In addition to attachment to slavery, the presence of missionaries and their ambiguous viewpoints on slavery influenced the decision of the Choctaws to join with the Confederacy. Cyrus Kingsbury and other missionaries' attempts to straddle the middle ground on the slavery debate alienated individuals of both persuasions, causing abolitionist to force the issue of abolition and pro-slavery secessionists to act upon fears of abolitionist sentiment.

Choctaw L.P. Ives was an abolitionist who directly attributed the Choctaws' alliance with the Confederacy to the missionaries. He singled out the Reid family as "the most rabid secessionist I think of all the missionaries" and questioned if their feelings had changed as they were threatened with hanging. In Ives' mind, secession "was a preconcerted [*sic*] among the missionaries" and planted while Choctaws' attentions were diverted elsewhere. He continued with the proclamation that he would feel joy "even that they may beat the funeral marches on Spencer parade ground for the burial of traitor missionaries, for they are more criminal than any of the Choctaws & should be punished with death." Ives himself joined Lincoln's Cavalry and was eventually assigned to recruit a "colored regiment" to do battle against slave owners.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Bonnifield, "The Choctaw Nation on the Eve of the Civil War", 387; Kidwell, *The Choctaws in Oklahoma*, 78-79; Joel Spring, *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family and Its Tribe, 1763-1995* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1996), 160; Akers, *Living in the Land of Death*, 130.

¹⁰⁶ Ives to Lee, February 3, 1862, September 16, 1864 Box 1, Folder 5, *The Colonel Dawes Collection*.

Though Ives believed the missionaries to be pro-slavery secessionists, others in the Choctaw Nation and across the Red River in Texas firmly believed them to be abolitionist. Whether or not missionaries were abolitionists was irrelevant because the title of abolitionist was hoisted upon them. This contributed to Choctaw involvement with the Confederacy in that it provoked Texans and Arkansans to take actions to secure the slaveholding territory and attempt to expel accused abolitionists. Two newspapers, the *Choctaw Intelligencer* out of Doaksville and the *Northern Standard* out of Clarksville, Texas, debated the issue of missionaries intents and actions.

The *Northern Standard* accused missionaries of harboring runaways out of abolitionist sentiments. A firm response appeared in the *Choctaw Intelligencer* from editor John P. Kingsbury (son of Cyrus Kingsbury), claiming that none of the clergy are “avowed abolitionists” and cited cases where runaways chose to avoid Choctaw territory and travel a greater distance to stay in Texas. He also noted a total lack of evidence for any of the “libelous claims” made by the *Northern Standard*. Through a series of heated and sarcastic responses the *Northern Standard* produced only one specific example of an abolitionist missionary. The man that they selected was also a piano repairman named Horace Pitkin, who worked and vacationed in northeast Texas. When the *Choctaw Intelligencer* questioned the validity of Pitkin as a Choctaw representative, the *Northern Standard* refused to retract or qualify the statement and continued to print warnings to Texas slave owners about abolitionist missionaries. Texans responded by attempting to have missionaries removed from the Choctaw Nation via the Choctaw Council. The Council refused the proposed act; however, such actions demonstrated that Texans would actively oppose reported abolitionism in Choctaw lands. Pushing for an alliance with the

Confederacy during the Civil War was simply an extension of this policy.¹⁰⁷

The final cause cited for Choctaw involvement with the Confederacy that pertains to slavery was the inability of the Choctaws to remain neutral due to outside pressures. In the case of Texas, the federal government reputedly offered Unionist Governor Sam Houston assistance to try to keep Texas in the Union. No such offer was extended to the Choctaws as Union troops abandoned all forts between Texas and the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaws stood little chance of victory with armed resistance and the Confederacy had no interest in neutrality. Inevitably, the Choctaws acquiesced to joining the Confederacy for the same reason they acquiesced in removal from Mississippi--because they had no other viable option.¹⁰⁸

Attempts at neutrality under Pitchlynn's leadership revealed that to the Choctaws financial concerns were as important than the principle of slavery. Large slave owners undoubtedly would lose significant financial capital if slavery were to be abolished, but the significant debt owed from the United States to the Choctaw Nation was potentially much more and affected the Nation as a whole. Pitchlynn cited this argument in a debate over secession, claiming the "right to the land we now live on and all our invested funds are now in the hands of President Lincoln. These treaties are the only guarantees we have for our country and our monies." This argument is critical to understanding Choctaw involvement in the Civil War and commitment to slavery, that it was tertiary to other economic concerns. Slaveholding was important, but larger financial considerations came first. The opposition to this argument is that Choctaws responded well to conscription and readily enlisted in the Confederate Army.

However, as Pitchlynn explained, joining the Confederate Army was "the only means to save

¹⁰⁷ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, July 18, 1850, July 27, 1850; James D. Morrison, "Note on Abolitionism in the Choctaw Nation", *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 38 (1960), 79-80, 82. Lizzie Lee to Mother, December 30, 1860, Box 2, Folder 54, The Colonel Dawes Collection.

¹⁰⁸ Randolph B Campbell, *Sam Houston and the American Southwest* (New York: The Library of American Biography, 2007), 194.

themselves having no means of supporting themselves with ammunition or bread and meat.”¹⁰⁹

The Choctaws agreed to a peace treaty in 1866, but like the Confederate States, the ending of the Civil War hardly resolved the conflict regarding African Americans. Terms of the 1866 treaty were fairly lenient and allowed for a continuation of remaining annuities from land sales and previous treaties. However, contrary to the desires of the Choctaws, the treaty called for the abolition of slavery and the requirement that Choctaws adopt freedmen as citizens. Additionally, the Choctaws were required to sell part of their land to the United States for \$300,000. It was agreed that the money from this sale would be held in escrow until the Choctaw and Chickasaw passed laws providing “all the rights, privileges, and immunities, including the right of suffrage” to all citizens. The land would then be distributed to freemen, with each freedman receiving a parcel of forty acres. The Choctaw people resisted provisions of the treaty and refused to adopt former slaves until 1883.

Racial slavery was undoubtedly a critical element in the cultural development of the Choctaws and was a derivative of the peculiar institution in southern states. From available evidence, it cannot be determined whether treatment of Choctaw slaves varied from treatment of southern slaves; however, it can be seen that similarities in treatment frequently existed. The idea of genial and hospitable slave owners can no more be conclusively demonstrated for the Choctaws than for the antebellum South. The participation of Choctaws in the Civil War and formal alliance with the Confederacy was dominantly influenced by the slaveholding and a connection with southern identity, but was also influenced by financial concerns and an inability to remain neutral than a protection of the peculiar institution.

The year 1866 marked the end of slaveholding by the Choctaws, but like other southern states, this ending was forced upon the Choctaws and would not have naturally come without this

¹⁰⁹ Kidwell, *The Choctaws in Oklahoma*, 56-60; Akers, *Living in the Land of Death*, 140.

treaty for the foreseeable future. Had the Civil War not taken place, the rate of Choctaw slave ownership possibly would have reached the level of southern states and the Choctaws would be considered part of the South.

APPENDIX
1860 CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Churches	Slave Owners		Wives of Owners	Slaves	Legally Slaves	Free Colored
	Male	Female				
<u>Cherokee</u>	1	2				
Dixie	6-5	8-6		5		
Mt Zion	1	1				
Fairfield	3	4	5	14		2
Park Hills				1		2
Honey Creek				1		
	8 + 7 = 15		5	21		4
<u>Chatahoochee</u>						
Stockbridge	3			2		1
Pine Ridge	4		5	40		
Mayhew		2			2	
Chickasaw	1	2	8	80		6
Wheelock	8			9		
	16 + 4 = 20			131		7
Total		35		152		11

Among the ^{churches} 6 churches the Slaves mostly with Meth. & Bap.

Statistics of Slavery in the Mission Churches in the Cherokee & Chickasaw Counties, under the care of A. B. G. N. M. in 1845.

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