

Lesson 4: Historical Experiences from 1812-1865

1. A New Nation and the Promise of Empire

a.) After the War of 1812 concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1814, the U.S. government was for the first time able to assume complete autonomy, or sovereignty, over military, economic, and political affairs as they concerned the Native American population of the continent.

b.) Before the War of 1812, the U.S. had to carefully monitor the ever present relationships that were fostered between what remained of the British military presence in North America and the Indian Nations discontented with American encroachment on lands they understood to be theirs. Contemporary historians, such as Francis Paul Prucha, claim that prior to the War of 1812, American policymakers had to be wary of military and economic alliances forming between England and various Indian Nations, as these alliances had the potential to severally weaken both the political and economic sovereignty of the fledging American Nation as it tried to firmly establish itself.

c.) Indians have largely been considered peripheral participants in the politics of early America, but recent scholarship has shown that much of the early policy of the American government, beginning even before the Constitution

was ratified in 1789, concerns with establishing sound diplomatic relations with the Indian Nations.

2. The Cherokee Nation

a.) Long before U.S. solidified its position on the continent and began the process of westward expansion, the Cherokee Nation had created a strong central government over the eastern seaboard and had effectively maintained control over a vast territory for decades.

b.) Commenting on the size of the Cherokee Nation at the time of America's fight for independence (which is further explained in your reading) scholar Jill Norgren claims in her work *The Cherokee Cases* that "When the new republic of the U.S. established diplomatic relations with the Cherokee after the War of Independence, the relations-for example treaties- were explicitly described as relations between nations." (Remember the definition of the Commerce Clause put forth in your Lesson 4 Keywords and Phrases).

c.) In 1785, the Cherokee and the recently independent U.S. formally established peace with the signing of the Treaty of Hopewell. In this treaty, the U.S. formally recognized Cherokee sovereignty and, after gaining a large portion of eastern land, guaranteed the integrity of the remaining Cherokee lands.

d.) By 1801 and the election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency, many Americans (predominantly

citizens of the State of Georgia) were clamoring for an expansion of their state, so that the cotton industry would be allowed access to new lands. This expansion, Norgren writes, “could occur only through the destruction of Cherokee...political sovereignty and land rights.”

e.) While a national fervor grew that demanded the removal, or destruction, of the eastern Native American tribes, the Cherokee Nation responded to pressure and change by skillfully adapting and changing their political culture to be able to negotiate with Washington, D.C. and effectively manage their internal affairs.

f. According to Norgren, the older system of government “proved ineffective for day-to-day administrative tasks, and so in 1809 the Cherokee empowered a fixed executive group called the National Committee to look after the general warfare on a daily basis.” This group complimented the National Council, first created in the 1750’s. Further, in 1817, the Cherokee passed a law declaring that all acts undertaken by the National Committee had to be brought before members of the National Council “for their acceptance or dissent.”