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American Indians on the Cotton Frontier: Changing Economic Relations with Citizens and Slaves in the Mississippi Territory

Daniel H. Usner, Jr.

The popular view of how the Cotton South began tells us that Eli Whitney's cotton gin overcame the only real barrier to the expansion of commercial agriculture and slavery into "unsettled" parts of the Deep South. With industrialized textile factories demanding larger quantities of cotton, manufacturers and merchants indeed began during the 1790s to encourage cotton agriculture in North America as well as in Asia, West Africa, Brazil, and the Caribbean. Their demand for more cotton supplies coincided with a sharp drop in the prices of tobacco, rice, and indigo due to glutted markets and the removal of bounties by European importers. To avert financial losses from declining prices of those staples, more and more cultivators attempted to grow cotton in upland areas of the South. Influenced by the promotional campaign of English industrialists, governments in the British Caribbean, the American state of Georgia, and the Spanish colony of Louisiana rewarded experimentation on gins that could accelerate the separation of seeds from the tightly clinging fiber of green-seed, short-staple cotton—the variety that grew best in the southern interior.¹

Little is known, however, about the less benign economic changes wrought within regions undergoing that agricultural expansion, especially those experienced by American Indians. The takeoff of cotton production in the Mississippi Territory coincided with a decline in the deerskin trade still important to most Indian communities during the early nineteenth century. The United States government, with cooperation from merchants familiar with Indian commerce, accelerated both processes by manipulating trade debts of Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek leaders into cessions of land from the tribes. Indian peoples coped with their diminishing land base through different

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¹ Michael M. Edwards, *The Growth of the British Cotton Trade, 1780–1815* (Manchester, 1967), 75–106; Paul W. Gates, *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815–1860* (New York, 1960), 1–21. On the shift to cotton cultivation in the Natchez area, see Jack D. L. Holmes, *Gayoso: The Life of a Spanish Governor in the Mississippi Valley, 1789–1799* (Baton Rouge, 1965), 96–101; and D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 48–53.

economic strategies. Some groups migrated out of the territory, but most remained and tried to diversify trade with the United States, became itinerant laborers and vendors, or intensified their own horticultural production. Concentration on the territorial period of Mississippi history allows us to examine initiatives taken by Indians in face of rapid change and, furthermore, at a time preceding the influence of Protestant missionaries.

Changing economic relations with American settlers and Afro-American slaves also shaped Indian life on the cotton frontier. With noteworthy irony many of these newcomers, who are usually cast by historians in a one-dimensional shove against Indians, relied on economic exchange with Indians or on other economic activities resembling Indian livelihood. Nevertheless, a widening separation between racial groups occurred during the territorial years as laws and patrols tried to restrict economic relations and activities among Indians and blacks. The transformation of the region into the cotton states of Mississippi in 1817 and Alabama in 1819 also involved the use of military force to quell slave rebellion and Indian resistance. Examination of Indians' economic relations with both citizens and slaves in the Mississippi Territory, therefore, reveals significant dimensions of the incipient cotton economy in the early nineteenth-century South.

By 1793, when use of Whitney's patented gin began to spread across the southern hinterland, the region between the Chattahoochee and the Mississippi rivers was still very much Indian country. The Indian population in that area numbered at least 30,000 individuals, most of whom lived in the more than one hundred villages that constituted the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations. Within the same territory were only about 2,500 whites and 2,000 blacks, mostly concentrated in settlements along the lower Tombigbee River and around the Natchez banks of the Mississippi.² In order to counteract the United States' claims to territory and its demands for navigating the Mississippi River, Spanish officials made serious efforts during the 1790s to attract American settlers to Louisiana. A generous land policy offered immigrants sizable grants of free land in proportion to the size of their families and the number of their laborers. Larger diplomatic considerations, however, compelled Spain in the Treaty of San Lorenzo, 1795, to cede to the United States all lands east of the Mississippi River and above the thirty-first parallel. In 1798 the United States Congress organized that cession into the Mississippi Territory, which was by the turn of the century occupied by nearly 5,000 whites, 3,500 black slaves, and 200 free blacks, in addition still to more than 30,000 Indians.³

² My estimate of an Indian population of at least 30,000 includes 15,160 Creeks, 11,447 Choctaws, and 2,400 Chickasaws. These tribal counts do not include separate Indian communities such as the Chickamauga Cherokees in the Tennessee Valley. Lawrence Kinnaird, trans. and ed., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794* (3 vols., Washington, 1946-1949), III, 229-33; Jack D. L. Holmes, "The Choctaws in 1795," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, 30 (Spring 1968), 33-49; U.S. Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* (2 vols., Washington, 1832-1848), I, 39; Census of the District of Mobile, Jan. 1, 1787, Works Progress Administration transcript, vol. 3, doc. 226, Favrot Papers (Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans); Holmes, *Gayoso*, 115.

³ Holmes, *Gayoso*, 23-24; James, *Antebellum Natchez*, 41-42; "Schedule of the whole Number of Persons in the Mississippi Territory, 1801," manuscript, Mississippi Territorial Census

Indian nations not only comprised the majority of the new territory's population in 1798 but held title, guaranteed by treaties with both Spain and the United States, to most of its land. Indian policy, therefore, was an integral priority in the United States government's territorial organization of Mississippi. The United States entered the nineteenth century with four major goals in Indian affairs. The first goal of establishing and maintaining alliances with tribes required, in compliance with Indian customs, a well-regulated, steady trade relationship. In the Mississippi Territory the task was especially difficult because Spain, which had developed strong political and commercial ties with the tribes of the area, possessed adjacent territories—Louisiana until 1803 and Florida until 1819. To enforce a second policy goal, the maintenance of peace and order among Indian peoples and between them and American citizens, United States agents in the Mississippi Territory entered a highly volatile world shaped by two decades of Anglo-American encroachment into Indian country and of intertribal struggle over diminishing resources. As reported by Gov. Winthrop Sargent in 1799, the Choctaws already felt "that their Country once affording abundance had become desolate by the hands of a People who knew them not but to increas their Wretchedness." Partially to diffuse resentment among Indians over such conditions and to make them more tractable, the government also pursued a third goal of reforming Indian societies by teaching "the Arts of husbandry, and domestic manufactures" and encouraging, as Secretary of War Henry Dearborn further suggested to Choctaw agent Silas Dinsmoor, "the growth of Cotton as well as Grain." Finally and most importantly, the goal of acquiring land cessions from Indian nations shaped policy in the Mississippi Territory. "[T]he time will come when a cession of land may be necessary to us and not injurious to them," Secretary of State Timothy Pickering informed Sargent. Suggesting how bribery might work as a means toward effecting that end, he mentioned that when the time came "the grant of an annuity should be the consideration."⁴

An important instrument for implementing all of those goals was the establishment of government trading posts among the many tribes of the eastern

Returns, Territorial Governor RG 2 (Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson); C. Richard Arena, "Land Settlement Policies and Practices in Spanish Louisiana," in *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley, 1762–1804*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Urbana, 1974), 51–60. On political relations among the United States, Spain, and the Indian nations, see Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Mississippi Question, 1795–1803: A Study in Trade, Politics, and Diplomacy* (New York, 1934), esp. 51–97; and Thomas P. Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation, 1789–1819* (Baton Rouge, 1961), 43–101, 169–216.

⁴ W[illiam] C[harles] C[ole] Claiborne to Silas Dinsmoor, Jan. 28, 1803, Indian Department Journal, 1803–1808, Territorial Governor RG 2 (Mississippi Department of Archives and History); Dunbar Rowland, ed., *The Mississippi Territorial Archives, 1798–1803: Executive Journals of Governor Winthrop Sargent and Governor William Charles Cole Claiborne* (Nashville, 1905), 148–49; Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. V: *The Territory of Mississippi, 1798–1817* (Washington, 1937), 58, 146. For a general discussion of United States Indian policy during the Mississippi territorial period, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790–1834* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); Martin Abbott, "Indian Policy and Management in the Mississippi Territory, 1798–1817," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 14 (July 1952), 153–69; and Joseph T. Hatfield, *William Claiborne: Jeffersonian Centurian in the American Southwest* (Lafayette, La., 1976), 41–66.

woodlands and midwestern prairies. The first two having been legislated into existence by Congress in 1795, those stores or trade factories provided Indians with fixed exchange rates and ample supplies of merchandise and thereby facilitated regulation of Indian trade. A factory among the Creeks began at Colerain on the St. Mary's River in 1795 and moved in succeeding years to more western locations. In 1802 a Chickasaw store was constructed at Chickasaw Bluffs near present-day Memphis, and a Choctaw post opened at Fort St. Stephens on the Tombigbee River. Daily records for those trade houses reveal that on a local level Indian commerce and trading practices were important facets of frontier life in early nineteenth-century Mississippi. Indians daily exchanged deerskins, beeswax, and small animal skins for cloth, blankets, ammunition, and steel implements. During the first decade of the century, when the United States factories purchased deerskins at twenty cents per pound, the Choctaw post alone exported over twenty thousand dollars' worth of peltry each year.⁵

Although on a day-to-day basis the trade houses allowed traditional economic activities to continue, their function of extending credit to individual chiefs and traders actually facilitated the displacement in the South of an Indian trade economy by a cotton export economy. Most transactions were carried out by barter, but certain persons were allowed goods in advance of payment. Chiefs, captains, interpreters, and traders—many of mixed ancestry—fell into increasing debt to the factories. In the Choctaw nation, for example, of the \$3,875 due to the United States trade house at the end of 1809, Mushulatubbee, son of the recently deceased Mingo Homastubbee, owed \$1,059; Capt. Tisho Hollatlak owed \$616; Mingo Pushmataha, \$499; mixed-blood traders John Forbes and William Jones, \$290 and \$229 respectively; and interpreter John Pitchlynn, \$180. Between 1802 and 1815, deerskins passed through Fort St. Stephens in abundance, but by the end of that period the Choctaws still owed \$7,500 to the United States. The drop in the price paid for deerskins in 1812 from twenty to seventeen cents per pound made it even more difficult to meet their obligations: The Choctaws produced 2,317 more pounds in 1812 than in 1811, but they earned \$158 less. While the literature on United States trade houses has tended to emphasize losses incurred by the government, the impact of a deteriorating trade position upon Indian livelihood evidenced at the factories has remained poorly understood.⁶

At a time when prices for deerskins were dropping in Europe and when supplies of game were diminishing in the southeastern woodlands, the economic position of Indians was further exacerbated by the fiscal tightening exerted by their private and public trading partners. Through most of the eighteenth cen-

⁵ Ora Brooks Peake, *A History of the United States Indian Factory System, 1795–1822* (Denver, 1954), 11–15; Aloysius Plaisance, "The Choctaw Trading House—1803–1822," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, 16 (Fall–Winter 1954), 393–423; Nella J. Chambers, "The Creek Indian Factory at Fort Mitchell," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, 21 (1959), 15–53; Choctaw Factory Daybooks, 1808–19, Records of the Office of Indian Trade, RG 75 (National Archives).

⁶ Choctaw Factory Daybooks, 1808–19, Records of the Office of Indian Trade; Peake, *History of the United States Indian Factory System*, 204–56; Herman J. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney: Architect of America's Early Indian Policy, 1816–1830* (Chicago, 1974), 47–70.

tury, colonial officials and merchants had followed Indian trade protocol, which included the practices of offering presents, smoking the calumet, and sharing food. By the end of the century, however, the United States began to discourage outright gift giving and, through its trade houses, to replace what had been political obligations with accountable debts. Influential leaders and intermediary traders still received extra merchandise for their peltry, but each advance was now carefully recorded in the debt column of the tribe's account book. In the Mississippi Territory the results of that practice materialized first among the Creeks in the Treaty of Fort Wilkinson, 1802. Of the \$25,000 received by the tribe for a cession of land between the Oconee and the Ocmulgee rivers, \$10,000 went "to satisfy certain debts due from Indians and white persons of the Creek country to the factory of the United States."⁷

After sending the Creek treaty to Congress, President Thomas Jefferson turned his attention to that portion of Chickasaw territory "of first importance to us" and evaluated several means through which the United States "may advance towards our object." One means was to encourage plow agriculture, which would reduce the acreage of farmland needed by Indians; another was to nourish their allegiance "by every act of justice & of favor which we can possibly render them." But a third approach involved selectively extending credit to draw the Chickasaws into debt. Jefferson realized it would be beneficial "to establish among them a factory or factories for furnishing them with all the necessaries and comforts they may wish (spirituous liquors excepted), encouraging these and especially their leading men, to run in debt for these beyond their individual means of paying; and whenever in that situation, they will always cede lands to rid themselves of debt." Within a few months Gov. William C. C. Claiborne of Mississippi instructed agent Samuel Mitchell to sound "some of the chiefs" of the Chickasaws on whether "the nation is willing to assume and pay the debts of individuals . . . by a sale of some of their lands to the United States." In July 1805 the Chickasaw tribe signed a treaty ceding all claim to lands north of the Tennessee River in exchange for \$20,000 "for the use of the nation at large, and for the payment of the debts due to their merchants and traders." Of that sum, \$12,000 went to merchant Forbes, who had participated directly in the treaty negotiations.⁸

The firm Panton, Leslie and Company in Spanish West Florida, renamed John Forbes and Company in 1804, had been trading for deerskins with Indian villagers across the Deep South since 1783. After the Treaty of San Lorenzo was made in 1795, the company initiated appeals to the United States for assistance in collecting approximately \$170,000 claimed from the Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Cherokees. As its commerce shifted to buying

⁷ Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 669; Dorothy V. Jones, *License for Empire: Colonialism by Treaty in Early America* (Chicago, 1982), esp. 157–86.

⁸ Thomas Jefferson, "Hints on the Subject of Indian Boundaries, suggested for Consideration. December 29th, 1802," in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh (20 vols., Washington, 1903–1904), XVII, 373–74; Claiborne to Samuel Mitchell, March 23, 1803, Indian Department Journal, 1803–1808; Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 697; "John Forbes & Co., Successors to Panton, Leslie & Co., vs the Chickasaw Nation: A Journal of an Indian Talk, July, 1805," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 8 (Jan. 1930), 131–42.

and exporting cotton through Mobile and Pensacola, the firm became less dependent on Indian trade and more determined to force payment of outstanding Indian debts. In 1797 partner Forbes visited Gov. William Blount of Tennessee, "in order to arrange the affairs of the Panton firm and to prevent the ruin of its trade." John McKee, a confidant of Blount later to be appointed United States agent to the Choctaws, was welcomed at the company's houses in Mobile and Pensacola shortly after Forbes returned to the coast. In a letter to Benjamin Hawkins, United States agent to the Creeks, William Panton tossed out the idea of extinguishing the debts of Indians "by a sale of some part of their lands." Recognizing the federal government's prohibition against any land cession without its sanction, Panton appealed for such support. If a cession to the company proved "inadmissible," he requested that "some other means will be pointed out equally commensurate with the object."⁹

Like the Chickasaw treaty of 1805, the Treaty of Mount Dexter made with the Choctaws that same year illustrates pointedly how, to their mutual benefit, the company and the United States worked out "some other means." With the cotton boom underway at the opening of the nineteenth century, officials of the Jefferson administration sought from the Choctaw nation some of the fertile land that stretched between the Alabama and the Mississippi rivers and discerned a convenient means of acquiring such a cession in the nearly fifty thousand dollars owed by the Choctaws to the Forbes company. In 1803 Dearborn signaled to Gen. James Wilkinson in the Mississippi Territory that "if no other consideration will induce the Chocktaws to part with any of their lands but that of paying off the debt they owe Panton & Co.," agent Dinsmoor should inquire into the willingness of tribal divisions to pay their respective shares out of lands sold west of the Yazoo River and east of the lower Tombigbee. Ephraim Kirby, first sent to the territory as land commissioner and then appointed judge, observed that lands on the east bank of the Tombigbee are fertile and not subject to inundation, "in all respects suitable for the most extensive operations of husbandry." Noting "poverty and distress" among the Choctaws due to scarce game and debauching contacts with settlers, the Connecticut Republican suggested that "through the agency of the white traders settled among them, they may be persuaded to exchange their country for a portion of the wilderness of Louisiana."¹⁰

By the time the United States began to pursue aggressively a Choctaw cession, the Forbes company was already employing its influence "in procuring the assent of the Indians." As recalled by partner William Simpson, "we exerted ourselves with the Chiefs of the Nation & spent much time, labor & Money" in encouraging a sale of land to the United States. We still need to un-

⁹ Robert S. Cotterill, "A Chapter of Panton, Leslie and Company," *Journal of Southern History*, 10 (Aug. 1944), 275-92; Manuel Gayoso de Lemos to Conde de Santa Clara, Sept. 24, 1797, *Papeles Procedentes de Cuba* transcripts (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh); William Panton to Benjamin Hawkins, June 11, 1799, *Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company* (University of West Florida Library, Pensacola). See also William S. Coker, *Historical Sketches of Panton, Leslie and Company* (Pensacola, 1976).

¹⁰ Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, V, 189; Ephraim Kirby to Thomas Jefferson, April 20, 1804, *Ephraim Kirby Papers* (Manuscript Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.); Kirby to Secretary of the Treasury Albert Galatin, July 1, 1804, *ibid.*

cover more details about the company's intrigue with the federal government and its brokers in the Choctaw nation and about the dissent and discord that it incited among the Choctaw people. But we already know that during 1804 Forbes corresponded with and even visited the secretary of war, having already convinced Choctaw leaders one year earlier to request the United States to purchase land for the purpose of paying their debts to the firm. The Jefferson administration had declined that offer because portions of territory designated by the tribe were not those specifically desired. But with pressure from its creditors persisting, the Choctaw nation sent a petition to President Jefferson in August 1804 proposing a cession acceptable to the government.¹¹

Arrangements for a treaty council with the Choctaws proceeded quickly and suspiciously. According to the instructions written by the secretary of war to the treaty commissioners, the cession designated in the Choctaw petition covered the highly fertile land between the Big Black and the Mississippi rivers. In an earlier letter to Dinsmoor, however, Dearborn had advised him "to prepare the minds of the Chiefs" for extending their cession over that very same area, indicating that the petition, at the very least, did not represent any consensus among Choctaw leaders. When the Choctaw chiefs met the United States commissioners at Fort St. Stephens in June 1805, they refused to cede any land near the Mississippi, prompting months of deadlock. That stand finally drove the commissioners, following a round of heated negotiations in November, to accept an offer of different lands—a huge tract comprising the southern border of Choctaw country and extending eastward from the Homochitto River to the watershed between the Tombigbee and the Alabama rivers.¹²

Of the \$50,500 offered the Choctaws for those four million acres of land, \$48,000 were reserved for discharging their debt to the Forbes company. The United States also promised the tribe an annuity of \$3,000 in merchandise. Each of the three "great medal mingo"—Puckshenubbee, Homastubbee, and Pushmataha—was granted \$500 "in consideration of past services in their nation" and was offered an annuity of \$150 "during their continuance in office." Villagers who used the ceded area directed most of their opposition to the treaty against those leaders, but to little avail. Because the Treaty of Mount Dexter produced lands in the less fertile pine barrens and swamps of southern Mississippi rather than in the rich Yazoo River delta targeted in the commissioners' instructions, Jefferson did not submit it to the Senate for ratification until 1808, when foreign affairs made "a strong settlement of militia along our southern frontier" and the "consolidation of the Mississippi territory" important considerations. By April 1809, the Forbes company

¹¹ Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 748, 750; Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, vol. VI: *The Territory of Mississippi, 1798–1817, continued* (Washington, 1938), 123; "Memorial of John Forbes & Co. to the President of the United States," [1807], Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company; David H. White, "The John Forbes Company: Heir to the Florida Indian Trade, 1801–1819" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 1973), 64–77.

¹² Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, V, 343; Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 748–50.

received most of what it claimed against the Choctaws' account, minus \$4,304.25 disputed by agent Dinsmoor.¹³

The Treaty of Mount Dexter and other Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw treaties made during the first decade of the Mississippi Territory's existence reflected the entanglement of Indian villagers in the region within a chronic cycle of trade indebtedness and land cessions, a cycle that would steadily weaken their power and eventually culminate in removal. By 1822 the Choctaw nation, for example, ceded nearly thirteen million acres of land but still owed approximately thirteen thousand dollars to the United States trade house. The transfer of Indian land to the United States was, as the Choctaw and Chickasaw treaties of 1805 explicitly illustrate, further accelerated by cooperation between the federal government and merchant companies—a lesson that would not be lost on future administrators of Indian affairs.¹⁴

Indian inhabitants of the Mississippi Territory responded to their deteriorating economic position in a variety of ways, evincing a resourceful adaptability among native Americans too often neglected by historians. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, numerous Choctaw families and even some Creek villagers migrated across the Mississippi River and settled in the still-plentiful hunting grounds of the Ouachita, Red, and Atchafalaya river basins. As government trade-house records reveal, those who remained in their homelands continued to produce, although at a diminishing rate, deerskins and other furs. Still hoping to perpetuate their traditional exchange economy through adaptation, Indian men and women provided an array of other goods and services to the trade stores. During the five years from 1809 through 1813, the Choctaw factory received \$22,877 worth of raw deerskins (44,232 skins), \$4,109 worth of dressed deerskins, raccoon, lynx, and other miscellaneous pelts, \$1,749 worth of beeswax (7,958 pounds), \$145 worth of tallow (1,161 pounds), \$249 worth of corn (443 barrels), and \$24 worth of snakeroot (96 pounds). Indians occasionally sold their labor to the trade house in exchange for merchandise, working as boat hands, messengers, and boatbuilders. In January 1809, for

¹³ Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, I, 748–49, 751–52; Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, V, 434, VI, 123; Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville, 1970), 29, 32; Cotterill, "Chapter of Panton, Leslie and Company," 289–91.

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, *American State Papers: Public Lands* (3 vols., Washington, 1860–1861), III, 461–62; "A List of Individual debts Due to the Chaktaw Trading House, March 31st 1822," Choctaw Factory Miscellaneous Accounts, 1803–25, Records of the Office of Indian Trade. For summaries of Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw treaties with the United States during the Mississippi territorial period, see Michael D. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln, 1982), 36–73; DeRosier, *Removal of the Choctaw Indians*, 27–52; and Arrell M. Gibson, *The Chickasaws* (Norman, 1971), 80–105. For the role that government-business cooperation played in accelerating Indian land loss during the nineteenth century, see Paul W. Gates, "Indian Allotments Preceding the Dawes Act," in *The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Mississippi West*, ed. John G. Clark (Lawrence, 1971), 141–70; James L. Clayton, "The Impact of Traders' Claims on the American Fur Trade," in *The Frontier in American Development: Essays in Honor of Paul Wallace Gates*, ed. David M. Ellis et al. (Ithaca, 1969), 299–322; and Robert A. Trennert, Jr., *Indian Traders on the Middle Border: The House of Ewing, 1827–54* (Lincoln, 1981), esp. 55–57, 77–84, 96–115.

example, the Choctaw factor "Bartered with an Indian" two yards of strouds valued at \$3.50 for a "Canoe" (pirogue) that he gave to the trade house.¹⁵

Many Indians became seasonal laborers or itinerant peddlers around the towns and plantations of the Mississippi Territory. As early as 1808 Choctaw women picked cotton during the harvest season for cloth, blankets, utensils, and even cash wages. John A. Watkins first became acquainted with the Choctaws in 1813–1814, "as they came into Jefferson Co. in the fall and winter in large numbers, the women to pick cotton, the men to hunt in the Louisiana swamps." From bark-covered huts that were always left open on the south side, hunters pursued deer and bear across the Mississippi while women worked in cotton fields east of the river. Those seasonally mobile camps of Choctaw families—the cotton economy's first migrant labor force—also sold dressed deerskins, bear oil, and venison at landings along the Mississippi or took those and other products to Natchez, where according to Watkins "they were usually exchanged for blankets, stroud & calico supplemented by a jug of whiskey."¹⁶

To maintain an economic base within their diminishing tribal domains, the Indian peoples also changed their farming and settlement patterns. Many Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws had been raising livestock for some time, but at the opening of the nineteenth century that activity became a more important means of livelihood. As more grazing land was needed and as immigrants and travelers created a demand for foodstuffs, Indian villages began to spread outward from their previously more compact centers. The process was most visible among the Upper Creeks, many of whom settled on the outskirts of their towns as they became more attentive to cattle, hogs, and horses. The inhabitants of Hoithlewalli, for example, formed new settlements with fenced-in fields along the small tributaries of the Oakfuskee Creek, once reserved by the town for bear hunting and now providing "delightful range for stock." Choctaw and Chickasaw farmers also homesteaded outward from their villages during the early territorial period. Traveling from Natchez to the Chickasaw nation in the summer of 1805, Dr. Rush Nutt observed some Choctaws "building log houses & cultivating the earth in corn, cotton, & other garden vegetables." Farther along the Natchez Trace—at Chukasalaya, Estockshish, and Bear Creek—he found Chickasaws establishing supply stations for travelers, raising "plenty of hogs & cattle," and farming grain crops.

¹⁵ John Sibley, *A Report from Natchitoches in 1807*, ed. Annie Heloise Abel (New York, 1922); Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln, 1983), 97–146; Choctaw Factory Daybooks, 1808–19, Records of the Office of Indian Trade; Choctaw Factory Miscellaneous Accounts, 1803–25, *ibid.*

¹⁶ John A. Watkins, "Choctaw Indians," John A. Watkins Manuscripts (Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans); Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846*, vol. IV: *Cuming's Tour to the Western Country (1807–1809)* (Cleveland, 1904), 351–52; John McKee to Andrew Jackson, Nov. 19, 1814, microfilm reel 14, Andrew Jackson Papers (Library of Congress).

Chickasaw families were also settling westward in the Yazoo delta in order to use better range for their horses, cattle, and hogs.¹⁷

The Indian trade economy that had grown around the exchange of deerskins for European manufactures was not impervious to accommodating the cotton economy, although the latter did threaten to displace the former entirely. During the eighteenth century Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley had adopted European and African food crops, developed their own herds of livestock, and traded those and other items to colonists. In keeping with that pattern of adaptation, Indian villagers in the Mississippi Territory began to grow their own cotton for the export market. Traders Abram Mordecai and John and William Price established cotton gins at "Weathersford's racetrack" and "the Boat Yard," both along the Alabama River, where they purchased cotton produced by Creek farmers. Chickasaw chiefs inquired as early as 1803 whether the United States factor at Chickasaw Bluffs would accept their cotton for cash.¹⁸

But even though the cotton economy began to replace the deerskin trade economy, Indian communities in the Mississippi Territory continued to create economic niches for some settlers and slaves. Before the region became a United States territory, many French and English traders had established their deerskin commerce in particular villages by marrying Indian women. Into the nineteenth century many of their offspring continued to play prominent roles in the regional economy and were joined by American newcomers licensed by the territorial government. As transportation on roads through Indian country increased, some of those traders even opened facilities that provided food and lodging to travelers. In addition to the actual traders who dealt directly with Indian villagers, Indian commerce employed black as well as white laborers at several different tasks: transporting products by packhorses or by boats, helping to preserve and to pack the deerskins, and doing construction work on the facilities. At both private trade firms and government factories, settlers worked for wages, and slaves were hired out by their owners. The experience among Indians gained by some black slaves, particularly those owned by whites and Indians engaged in trade, was evident to early territorial witnesses by the presence of blacks in settlements and villages who could interpret between the various Indian languages and English.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Mississippi Herald and Natchez City Gazette*, June 15, 1804; Dinsmoor to Cato West, June 10, June 15, 1804, Indian Department Journal, 1803–1808; Benjamin Hawkins, "A Sketch of the Creek Country, in the Years 1798 and 1799," *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, vol. III, pt. 1 (Savannah, 1848), 26–66, esp. 32–33; Jesse D. Jennings, ed., "Nutt's Trip to the Chickasaw Country," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 9 (Jan. 1947), 40–45, 60–61.

¹⁸ Claiborne to Mitchell, April 29, 1803, Indian Department Journal, 1803–1808; Albert James Pickett, *History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, from the Earliest Period* (2 vols., Charleston, 1851), II, 189–90.

¹⁹ Pickett, *History of Alabama*, II, 123–35; Hawkins, "Sketch of the Creek Country," 26–48; Jennings, ed., "Nutt's Trip to the Chickasaw Country," 41–44; Bonds of Tax Collectors, Sheriffs and Indian Traders, 1802–1817, Territorial Governor RG 2 (Mississippi Department of Archives and History); Dawson A. Phelps, "Stands and Travel Accommodations on the Natchez Trace," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 11 (Jan. 1949), 1–54; Dawson A. Phelps, ed., "Excerpts from the Journal of the Reverend Joseph Bullen, 1799 and 1800," *ibid.*, 17 (Oct. 1955), 262–63, 273;

Obstacles to landownership and uncertainties of cotton production during the territorial years challenged settlers in Mississippi to find means of livelihood that resembled the Indian mixture of hunting, farming, and herding. That adaptation by whites to the cotton frontier, more than the production of cotton itself, brought them face to face with local Indians. Before the United States even began to survey land in the Mississippi Territory, an estimated two thousand settlers had already squatted on unused lands. Governor Claiborne expressed hope in late 1802 "that these Citizens may be secured in their improvements, and that the Government will sell out the Vacant land in this district upon moderate terms and in small tracts to actual settlers." United States land policy, however, was committed to selling large rectangular tracts of land for revenues drastically needed by the treasury. Thus in March 1803 Congress extended to the Mississippi Territory the prescription that a minimum of 320 acres had to be purchased at two dollars per acre with one-fourth of the cost paid in cash at the sale or the registration. For people actually migrating into the territory, that system caused much anxiety because it encouraged speculation by land companies and required a minimum purchase unaffordable to many settlers.²⁰

Many of them drawn to the region by the prospects of growing cotton, several hundred Mississippi petitioners in 1803 asked Congress to encourage small holdings instead of large holdings, to prohibit land speculation, to reduce the national army, and to inhibit the spread of slavery. Congress responded to appeals by discontented territorial settlers both north and south of the Ohio River with new legislation in 1804 instituting the public sale of smaller tracts, 160 acres in quarter-sections, and reducing the minimum auction price to \$1.25 per acre. Conditions in the Mississippi Territory, however, militated against a speedy and democratic distribution of land. Surveyal of lands languished for a long time, and public auctions of available tracts did not begin until August 1809. As reported by William Lattimore in 1806, the expectation by families moving into the region "of being able to purchase lands of the Government . . . has not been realized." Not enough cleared land existed for them to rent from those who already owned landed property, and the cost of purchasing land from private sellers "was beyond their resources." The only other alternatives available to settlers were to return to their home states, to acquire land "upon the easiest terms" in the Spanish colony of Florida, and to squat on vacant lands of the United States in hope of securing preemption rights to their improvements; most migrants to the Mississippi Territory chose the last, although an unknown number did resort to the other alternatives. But just when claimants were allowed to begin purchasing their receipts, July 15, Oct. 6, 1803, March 9, 1807, Choctaw Factory Miscellaneous Accounts, 1803-25, Records of the Office of Indian Trade; Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Territorial Archives*, 164-65, 233-34; Jack D. L. Holmes, "The Role of Blacks in Spanish Alabama: The Mobile District, 1780-1813," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, 37 (Spring 1975), 5-18.

²⁰ Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801-1816* (6 vols., Jackson, 1917), I, 219; Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, V, 192-205, esp. 203; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (New York, 1968), esp. 26-70.

preempted lands in 1809, the price of cotton began to drop sharply mainly because of the embargo imposed by the federal government in 1808. Although cotton in New Orleans had been dropping slightly from a high of 25 cents per pound in September 1805, after the embargo the price plummeted to 12 cents by September 1809.²¹

Having counted on a promising income from cotton produced for the English market to pay off the installments due on their lands, farmers now faced the bleak prospect of forfeiting their newly acquired property. As the territory entered the second decade of the nineteenth century, mounting hostility from the Creek Indians and impending war against Great Britain deepened uncertainty and instability, pushed down the value of cotton even more, and slowed the sale of public lands. In one petition sent to Congress by inhabitants of the Mississippi Territory, the trap that cotton already set for the South—an economy highly sensitive to the price of a single commodity—was clearly defined: “Confiding as we have done on the measures of Government which were intended to restore foreign intercourse, and which held out the probability of success, we have continued to cultivate the article of cotton, to the growth of which our soil is so propitious, and omitted all or most other pursuits calculated to command money.”²²

Under those circumstances, squatting on the periphery of private landholdings and Indian villages or on federal lands and then raising livestock to sell to planters, townspeople, and newcomers became a pervasive means to economic security. Already familiar with open grazing in the backwoods of Georgia and the Carolinas, many settlers in Mississippi’s promising pine forests acquired cattle, horses, and hogs from Indians. Some bought the animals; others sequestered strays. In time, a family of squatters might earn enough from its own herding to purchase title to the land, or, if not, the mobility of livestock eased their relocation to another tract when threatened with eviction. Meanwhile, competition over grazing lands and ambiguity between trading and rustling heightened antagonism in their relations with Indians. Symbiotically, the success of some farmers in producing cotton and buying slaves—by creating a growing market for food—allowed those who were unable or unwilling to grow the staple a distinct avenue to economic security and social autonomy. From that process, among others, emerged the yeoman farmers of the nineteenth-century South, whose intermittent participation in the cotton economy through livestock trade buffered them from

²¹ Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, V, 279–87, 455; Benjamin Horace Hibbard, *A History of the Public Land Policies* (New York, 1924), 75; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 35–59; Frederick Kimball to Nephew and Niece, May 23, 1808, Frederick Kimball Letters (Department of Archives and History, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge); Flower & Faulkner to John Pintard, May 20, 1809, John M. Pintard Papers, *ibid.*; *Louisiana Gazette*, Aug. 30, 1805, Aug. 26, 1806, June 30, 1807; *Louisiana Gazette and New Orleans Daily Advertiser*, June 21, 1808, Sept. 1, 1809. Uncertainty over land titles and animosity toward land speculators were greatly exacerbated in the Mississippi Territory by claims to the Yazoo River valley sold by the Georgia state legislature. See Abernethy, *South in the New Nation*, 136–68; and C. Peter Magrath, *Yazoo: Law and Politics in the New Republic: The Case of Fletcher v. Peck* (Providence, 1966).

²² Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, VI, 226.

the risks of cotton agriculture and yet perpetuated their hopes of becoming slave-owning cotton farmers themselves.²³

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Mississippi Territory was fast becoming a cotton export region. Within a decade the non-Indian population had surpassed the number of Indians, increasing nearly fivefold to more than 23,000 settlers and 17,000 slaves. Although most white settlers still contended with obstacles to land acquisition and relied on multiple means of subsistence, planters who already possessed land or who could afford to purchase some in the private market committed more slaves to the production of more cotton. As one such individual described the process, "here you will ask, what do they want with so many negroes, the answer is, to make more Money—again, you will ask what do they want with so much Money, the answer is to buy more Negroes. . . . A Mans merit in this country, is estimated, according to the number of Negroes he works in the field."²⁴

The influx of Afro-American slaves into the territory affected the economic life of Indians as deeply and equivocally as did white migration. More vulnerable to territorial laws than were Indians, Afro-Americans also struggled to preserve some economic autonomy and resilience within the narrowing interstices of a slave-labor, cotton economy. By trading among themselves and with Indians and whites—in foodstuffs, home manufactures, and even forbidden horses—slaves tried to secure for themselves what has been lately called an "internal economy," distinct from but tied to the larger regional system of staple agriculture.²⁵ But legislation and slave patrols discouraged forms of economic exchange and social interaction that had previously brought blacks

²³ Frank Lawrence Owsley, "The Pattern of Migration and Settlement on the Southern Frontier," *Journal of Southern History*, 11 (May 1945), 147–76; Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1949), esp. 1–90; Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation," *Journal of Southern History*, 41 (May 1975), 147–66; Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review*, 85 (Dec. 1980), 1104–111; John D. W. Guice, "Cattle Raisers of the Old Southwest: A Reinterpretation," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 8 (April 1977), 167–87; Terry G. Jordan, *Trails to Texas: Southern Roots of Western Cattle Ranching* (Lincoln, 1981), 25–82; John Solomon Otto, "Southern 'Plain Folk' Agriculture: A Reconsideration," *Plantation Society in the Americas*, 2 (April 1983), 29–36; Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978), 69–74; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York, 1983), esp. 50–85, 239–89.

²⁴ John Mills to cousin Gilbert, May 19, 1807, John Mills Letters (Department of Archives and History, Louisiana State University); U.S. Census Bureau, *Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States of America and the Territories thereof, agreeable to actual enumeration made according to law, in the year 1810* (Washington, 1811), 83. On changing life on the cotton frontier, see Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, 1929), esp. 95–111, 274–304; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775–1850* (New York, 1978), 93–114, 192–217; William B. Hamilton, Jr., "American Beginnings in the Old Southwest: The Mississippi Phase" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1938); and W. B. Hamilton, "Mississippi 1817: A Sociological and Economic Analysis," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 29 (Nov. 1967), 270–92.

²⁵ Philip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country," *Journal of Southern History*, 49 (Aug. 1983), 399–420, esp. 414–17. See also Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 103–30, 195–217; and Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974), 535–40.

and Indians together—for example, in weekend marketing on the streets of Natchez. Meanwhile, some individuals within the Indian nations—principally members of mixed-blood, trade families—were themselves becoming owners of black slaves and planters of cotton. Although those developments eventually generated greater racial separation and stratification between southern Indians and blacks, they were too nascent before 1820 to close all channels of interethnic communication.²⁶

Throughout the colonial period slaves had perceived Indian country as potential refuge from bondage, and the increasing presence there of blacks owned by tribal members during territorial years may have even encouraged some runaways to take advantage of the confusion accompanying the movement of slaves to and from Indian jurisdictions. Cases of slaves being arrested by United States Indian agents for “want of a passport” and disputes over ownership of slaves who “ran away or were stolen” suggest that the blacks involved were playing an active role in creating their uncertain status within Indian country. Whether as slaves or as runaways, blacks who interacted closely with Indians during the early nineteenth century contributed to the formation of multiracial families and even of scattered communities across the South. One such community, whose members became known as “Cajuns of Alabama,” grew rapidly during the territorial period along the west bank of the Mobile River; another group known as “Freejacks” took shape on the Tchefuncte River in Louisiana, along the Natchez-to-New Orleans road.²⁷

Given the potential for increasing ties with blacks, Indians found their own activities and mobility being curtailed by the Mississippi territorial government’s efforts to reinforce the institution of slavery. In addition to federal laws requiring licenses and prohibiting alcohol in Indian trade, which were enforced by all territorial governors, Governor Sargent issued an ordinance in May 1800 to strengthen control jointly over commerce with Indians and slaves in Mississippi. The mere sight of an Indian or slave carrying into a house or store

²⁶ On slavery in the Indian nations of the Mississippi Territory, see Wyatt F. Jeltz, “The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians,” *Journal of Negro History*, 33 (Jan. 1948), 24–37; Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., “Pioneers with Conflicting Ideals: Christianity and Slavery in the Choctaw Nation,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, 21 (July 1959), 174–89; Michael F. Doran, “Negro Slaves of the Five Civilized Tribes,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 68 (Sept. 1978), 335–50; and Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westport, 1979), 26–109. For a provocative explanation of the biological and cultural significance of Indian-black interaction, see J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indians in the Old South* (New York, 1981), 248–78.

²⁷ Archives of the Spanish Government of West Florida, 1782–1810, Works Progress Administration typescript translations (18 vols., Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans), vol. 4, 165, vol. 7, 345–80; Gilbert Russell to Governor Holmes, April 30, 1811, Correspondence and Papers of Governor David Holmes, Territorial Governor RG 2 (Mississippi Department of Archives and History); Dinsmoor to Holmes, May 4, 1811, *ibid.*; John Pitchlynn to Dinsmoor, May 30, 1811, *ibid.*; Dinsmoor to Secretary of War William Eustis, Sept. 27, 1812, microfilm reel 5, Andrew Jackson Papers; Horace Mann Bond, “Two Racial Islands in Alabama,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 36 (Jan. 1931), 552–67; J. Anthony Paredes, “Back from Disappearance: The Alabama Creek Indian Community,” in *Southeastern Indians since the Removal Era*, ed. Walter L. Williams (Athens, Ga., 1979), 123–41; Darrell A. Posey, “Origin, Development and Maintenance of a Louisiana Mixed-Blood Community: The Ethnohistory of the Freejacks of the First Ward Settlement,” *Ethnohistory*, 26 (Spring 1979), 177–92.

“any article which may be supposed for sale, or any bottle, jug or other thing in which liquor may be conveyed” was sufficient evidence for convicting the storekeeper or housekeeper. An initial law requiring slaves who participated in the Natchez marketplace to carry permits issued by their owners was extended over the entire territory in 1805 to declare that “no person whatsoever shall buy, sell, or receive of, to or from a slave, any commodity whatsoever without the leave or consent of the master, owner or overseer of such slave, expressive of the article so permitted to be bought, sold or bartered.” Guilty persons would pay to slave owners four times the value of the item exchanged, the slave would receive ten lashes, and owners who allowed a slave “to go at large and trade as a freeman” had to pay a fine of fifty dollars. A statute enacted in 1810 further increased the risk of independent marketing to slaves by making it lawful for any citizen to apprehend a slave suspected of carrying goods without written consent.²⁸

The exchange of two items in particular—cotton and horses—threatened the property of planters and received special attention from lawmakers. In the spring of 1800, slaves were prohibited from the “raising and Vending of Cotton” and from “holding property in horses.” Although some owners apparently permitted those activities, both the need to prevent theft of those valuable products and the desire to limit avenues of financial independence activated a comprehensive prohibition against possession of cotton and horses by slaves. To reduce the chances of petty rustling by black and Indian herdsmen, an act of March 4, 1803, prescribed that “no person whosoever shall send or permit any slave or Indian to go into any of the woods or ranges in the territory, to brand or mark any horse, mare, colt, mule, ass, cattle, hog, sheep, under any pretence whatsoever; unless the slave be in company, and under the direction of some reputable white person.”²⁹

In southern folklore and history, Natchez and the road linking it with Nashville became legendary for crime and violence during the early nineteenth century. As the oldest and largest town in the territory (until Mobile was annexed in 1813), Natchez resembled urban places in other frontier or colonial regions in its very real function as a nexus of underground exchange activity and of volatile ethnic contact. “Ebriety of Indians and Negroes on Sundays,” complained Sargent on arriving in Natchez, made it “a most Abominable place”—a message that signaled his and subsequent governors’ commitment to reversing customary trends. The seasonal encampment of one hundred or so Choctaw families around Natchez, where they bartered for ammunition and other supplies for hunting trips, had become a familiar part of the cultural landscape before the end of the eighteenth century. Under United States territorial control, however, officials and propertied residents loathed what they

²⁸ William D. McCain, ed., *Laws of the Mississippi Territory, May 27, 1800* (Beauvoir Community, Miss., 1948), 237–40; *Statutes of the Mississippi Territory* (Natchez, 1816), 384, 388–89. For examples of licenses issued and of violations penalized, see Bonds of Tax Collectors, Sheriffs and Indian Traders, 1802–1817; and West to John Kincaid, Feb. 15, 1805, *Indian Department Journal*, 1803–1808.

²⁹ McCain, ed., *Laws of the Mississippi Territory*, 237–40; *Statutes of the Mississippi Territory*, 385–86, 393.

saw as pilfering, loitering, and carousing; thus they discouraged Indians from visiting the area. In 1807 Gov. Robert Williams even tried, with little effect, to require that Indians leaving their tribal lands carry passports to be issued at the discretion of government agents.³⁰

Incidents of drunken affrays and robberies among Choctaws, blacks, and whites, of violent and often fatal assaults committed against Indians, and of Indian thefts of livestock and crops were too numerous and various to describe here, but they all involved a confrontation between two different systems of justice. Much of the aggravation and theft perpetrated by Indians represented a form of banditry committed to protest against and compensate for the abandonment of protocol and respect by the growing American population. Because Choctaws traveling to hunt or to trade, for example, encountered more and more settlers unwilling or unable to share some corn or meat with them, as had traditionally been the case, they would simply take what was available from a field or pasture. Whenever an Indian was killed by a white or black assailant, an acute clash between tribal and territorial laws ensued. Although officials often expressed concern over the Indians' "Spirit of Retaliation," territorial courts rarely convicted and punished white men who murdered Indians on the pretense that guilt was difficult to prove in such crimes.³¹ Meanwhile, Indians followed their own rules of retributive justice, which required the kin of a victim to avenge his death by killing either the guilty person or some surrogate. As those of other United States territories, the early government of Mississippi tried, with great difficulty, to replace tribal systems of law and order with its own codes of trial and punishment. But in some cases of homicide against Indians, officials compromised by paying merchandise to relatives in compensation for their loss. In January 1809, for example, the Choctaw agent gave two hundred dollars' worth of strouds, blankets, and ammunition to the uncle and brother of an Indian killed the previous summer by William Bates. Bates reimbursed the agency in August. A revealing case of territorial conflict with Indian jurisdiction occurred in 1810, when two young Choctaws who executed another Choctaw under blood law outside the tribal boundary were arrested and imprisoned at Fort Stoddert. Fearful of "unpleasant consequences," Gov. David Holmes pardoned them but urged Judge Harry Toulmin "that they should be made sensible that they have been guilty of an infraction of our laws and that in future such conduct will not be tolerated."³²

³⁰ Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne*, I, 13–14, 67–70; Abbott, "Indian Policy and Management in the Mississippi Territory," 159–60; Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Territorial Archives*, 82.

³¹ Mills to cousin Gilbert, May 19, 1807, Mills Letters; White, *Roots of Dependency*, 97–112; Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Territorial Archives*, 123–24; entry for April 15, 1803, Indian Department Journal, 1803–1808; Claiborne to Mitchell, April 29, 1803, *ibid.*; Claiborne to Ochchum-mey, May 17, 1803, *ibid.*; Holmes to Mr. Newman, coroner, Dec. 15, 1812, Correspondence and Papers of Governor David Holmes.

³² Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne*, I, 13–14; receipt, Jan. 9, 1809, Choctaw Factory Miscellaneous Accounts, 1803–25, Records of the Office of Indian Trade; entry for Aug. 18, 1809, Choctaw Factory Daybooks, 1808–19, *ibid.*; Claiborne to Dearborn, June 28, 1803, Indian Department Journal, 1803–1808; West to Dearborn, June 2, 1804, *ibid.*; J. R. Wilson,

Behind all of the legislative and police action directed against slaves and Indians reigned a deep anxiety over black insurrection, Indian warfare, and even combined rebellion by the two groups. News of the Gabriel Prosser revolt that was barely averted in Virginia drove Sargent to address a circular letter of November 16, 1800, to slave owners in the Mississippi Territory, exhorting "the utmost Vigilance" toward all slaves. Recent assaults on two overseers were evidence enough that greater attention to the slave laws had to be given by "all good Citizens." Fear that the increasing in-migration of slaves would introduce experienced insurgents from other slave regions nearly produced in the territorial legislation a law that would have prohibited the importation of "Male Slaves, above the age of Sixteen."³³

The self-conscious endeavor by white Mississippians to establish slavery safely in the midst of a large Indian population elicited from their officials an obsessive concern with well-organized and trained militias, adequate weaponry, and a responsive federal army—all overtly effective means of controlling subjugated ethnic groups. Although military officials repeatedly assured the government that the army and the militia were prepared to quell any outbreak of Indian or black hostility, the very prospect of having to mobilize against rebellion in one part of the territory heightened the fear of exposing another part to concurrent attack. In January 1811 hundreds of slaves in the adjacent territory of Louisiana turned their hoes and axes against planters outside New Orleans. Their march toward the city was quickly and violently stopped by troops of the United States Army's Southern Division, led by the cotton planter Gen. Wade Hampton. That revolt, which resulted in the brutal and speedy killing of nearly one hundred blacks in Louisiana, intensified apprehension in the Mississippi Territory over thinly stretched defenses against both external and internal enemies. The declaration of war against Great Britain in 1812 then brought the fear of racial war on different fronts to a climax. In a letter to General Wilkinson concerning possible withdrawal of troops from the territory for action elsewhere, Governor Holmes recited his faith in the friendship of the Choctaws but warned that "knowledge of our defenceless state . . . may tempt them to commit aggressions." Regarding blacks, Holmes continued, "Of the slaves, who compose so large a portion of our population I entertain much stronger apprehensions. Scarcely a day passes

"A Statement of violence done to my person and property by the Choctaw Indians, Jan. 21, 1811," Correspondence and Papers of Governor David Holmes; Harry Toulmin to Holmes, May 27, July 7, 1810, *ibid.*; Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, VI, 69–70.

³³ Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Territorial Archives*, 311–12; Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne*, I, 39. It is important to note that the expansion of cotton agriculture in the lower Mississippi Valley coincided with a tightening of slave codes and a heightening of racial barriers across the South that reflected in large part a reaction to the contagion of rebellion among blacks in the Americas sparked by the slave revolution in St. Domingo. Many historians, however, continue to neglect or downplay the authenticity of this spreading rebelliousness and thereby miss its influence on the renewed codification of race relations that occurred during the early nineteenth century. See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 375–426; and Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York, 1981), 46–74.

without my receiving some information relative to the designs of those people to insurrect."³⁴

The Creek War of 1813–1814, waged in the eastern valleys of the Mississippi Territory, has recently received skillful attention in regard to both its wide context of international affairs and its internal dimension of tribal politics. But the function of the military conflict in expanding the cotton economy and in enforcing concomitant racial control is not yet fully appreciated. As already indicated, the territorialization of Mississippi imposed multiple pressures upon Indian societies. In the Creek nation, those pressures provoked increasing rebelliousness from a large segment of its population. Persistent demands by the Forbes company and the United States government that trade debts be paid through cessions of land severely tested the patience of Creek villagers. Indian leaders contested debts that were accounted to the nation but that actually had been incurred by individuals whose tribal status they did not recognize. When the company tried to add interest to their account, the Creeks grew angrier, insisting that "there was no word for it in their language" and accusing their old trade partner of wanting "to tear the very flesh off their backs."³⁵

Further aggravating those issues, settlers were sprawling from the Tennessee and Tombigbee-Alabama valleys, and territorial militiamen were making frequent border patrols into Creek country. The government's program of reforming, or "civilizing," Indian societies, which was aggressively implemented among the Lower Creeks by agent Hawkins, undermined the ability of the Creek nation to respond effectively to such pressures by expediting the emergence of a new class of assimilated Creek citizens who were themselves becoming cotton planters and slave owners. The tour of the rising Shawnee leader, Tecumseh, among the southern tribes during the summer and fall of 1811 injected into the already factionalized Creek nation a surge of religious nativism and political militance, which took hold most strongly among the angry young men of the Upper Creek towns. In the summer of 1812, the tribal council ordered the execution of a group of Red Sticks, as the rebels were called, who were accused of killing settlers in Tennessee on their return from the town in Indiana where Tecumseh and his brother, the "Shawnee Prophet," resided. And in November it agreed to pay some \$22,000 of debts owed the Forbes company by turning over to the firm each year the tribe's

³⁴ John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800–1861* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 25–32; Tommy R. Young II, "The United States Army and the Institution of Slavery in Louisiana, 1803–1815," *Louisiana Studies*, 13 (Fall 1974), 201–22; Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne*, I, 42–43; Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, V, 217, VI, 298–99, 301, 328–29; James H. Dormon, "The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana," *Louisiana History*, 18 (Fall 1977), 389–404.

³⁵ Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812–1815* (Gainesville, 1981), 6–94; Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, esp. 35–43; Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975), esp. 165–205; "John Forbes' record of his talks with chiefs of Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw tribes, held at Hickory Ground, 27 May–3 June 1803, concerning Indian debts," manuscript (Howard-Tilton Memorial Library); "Account of trip made into the Indian Country by John Innerarity, Oct. 14–Nov. 1, 1812," Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company.

annuities from the United States. Those two explosive developments helped bring civil war to the Creek people by 1813.³⁶

United States intervention against the rebellious Creeks came swiftly and forcefully, making the Mississippi Territory the theater of one of the nation's bloodiest and most costly Indian wars. In July 1813 a party of Red Sticks, carrying ammunition and other supplies from Pensacola, was attacked by a joint force of territorial militiamen and Lower Creek adversaries. In retaliation Creek rebels attacked Fort Mims at the confluence of the Alabama and the Tombigbee rivers. On August 30, 1813, approximately 250 of the men, women, and children who had sought refuge inside the fort were killed during a siege that lasted five hours. News of the "massacre," which included reports that black slaves had joined the Red Sticks, threw the Mississippi Territory and adjacent states into an alarm that speedily mobilized soldiers and citizens into action.³⁷

The invasion of Upper Creek country by four separate armies of militiamen and federal troops proved to be a painful experience for Indians and non-Indians. Red Stick fighters and their families managed to evade United States soldiers and their Indian allies, who in turn resorted to burning abandoned villages to the ground. After suffering ten months of sickness, hunger, desertion, and severe discipline, the invasionary armies backed the Creek rebels into a bend of the Tallapoosa River. On March 27, 1814, approximately 1,000 Red Sticks stood up against a combined force of 1,400 whites, 500 Cherokees, and 100 Lower Creeks in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, losing by the end of the day approximately 800 tribesmen killed. Having led personally the western Tennessee volunteers and provided much of the strategy in the Creek War, Andrew Jackson—a merchant, planter, and land speculator long interested in the Mississippi Territory—received command of the United States Army's Seventh Military District and proceeded to impose a peace treaty on the Creek nation. The beleaguered Creek leaders who signed the Treaty of Fort Jackson on August 9, 1814, agreed to cede fourteen million acres of land—more than one-half of present-day Alabama—even though most of them were Lower Creeks who had not rebelled against the United States.³⁸

The military subjugation of the Creek Indians greatly accelerated the transformation of ethnic relations already underway in the Mississippi Territory. Indian trade in deerskins and other frontier commodities would never recover in the Deep South, forcing most Indian villagers to become marginal participants in the emerging cotton economy while allowing some to accumulate their own property in cotton lands and Negro slaves. Although banditry and violence would continue to serve many Indians in Mississippi and

³⁶ Theron A. Nunez, Jr., "Creek Nativism and the Creek War of 1813–1814, Part 2 (Stiggin's Narrative, continued)," *Ethnohistory*, 5 (Spring 1958), 145; Green, *Politics of Indian Removal*, 39–42.

³⁷ H. S. Halbert and T. H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (Chicago, 1895), 125–76; Rogin, *Fathers and Children*, 148; Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 30–41.

³⁸ Halbert and Ball, *Creek War of 1813 and 1814*, 177–286; Rogin, *Fathers and Children*, 149–64; Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 42–94.

Alabama as means of resistance, the Creek War demonstrated the futility and danger of military confrontation and drove surviving militants out of the territory and into Florida. The Creek land cession that resulted from their defeat drastically contracted the area of Indian country and intensified the physical isolation of Indian villages from other inhabitants. Furthermore, the sudden availability of so much land to settlers, coinciding with the post-Napoleonic expansion of the demand for cotton in Europe, set in motion the great wave of public land sales and immigration that guaranteed the dominance of cotton agriculture over the territory's political offspring—the states of Mississippi and Alabama.

The "Alabama Fever," as the postwar boom in land sales and cotton production was called, revived the conflict between immigrant settlers and land speculators. As the average price of public land in the Creek cession rose above five dollars per acre by 1818, crowds of angry squatters assembled at land auctions to push for registration of their claims at the minimum price. Hostility toward large purchasers was tempered, however, by the heady climb of cotton prices above thirty cents per pound. Eager to produce for such an export market, small farmers and wealthy planters alike borrowed more and more money in order to purchase both land and labor. In 1817, the year in which Alabama became a separate territory and Mississippi acquired statehood, cotton annually exported from the region exceeded seventeen million pounds. The fragile financial basis of the expansion, though, soon reached its breaking point. Just as Alabama was becoming a state, cotton prices plummeted in the panic of 1819 well below twenty cents per pound and stranded Alabamians with a land debt of eleven million dollars. But the cotton-export economy had already taken hold of land and labor across the South. Following a short period of contraction and adjustment, white Mississippians and Alabamians proceeded to import more slaves from eastern states and to expand cotton production across more land, of course borrowing more money to finance both.³⁹

Development of a cotton economy drastically altered the economic relations of Indian peoples with citizens and slaves in the Mississippi Territory. The United States government, through its own trade houses and with cooperation from private companies, pressured Indian tribes into making repeated cessions of land. In the concomitant transfer of public land into the private market, the federal government allowed speculation by land companies and made ownership difficult for early nineteenth-century migrants. Settlers coped with that obstacle and with the uncertainty of cotton production through means of livelihood similar to those of neighboring Indians. Territorial laws meanwhile restricted the economic activities of slaves and limited their interaction with free individuals, confining them more to the production of cotton for their

³⁹ Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815–1828* (University, Ala., 1965), 34–71; Charles S. Davis, *The Cotton Kingdom in Alabama* (Montgomery, 1939), 25–32; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 97–126; J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 6–20; Lewis E. Atherton, *The Southern Country Store, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1949), 18–37, 113–44; Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800–1925* (Lexington, Ky., 1968), 129–95.

owners. The Creek War, more than any other action, accelerated the physical confinement of Indians into ethnic enclaves. By 1820 an American Indian population of more than 30,000 persons was surrounded by 42,000 whites and 33,000 blacks in the state of Mississippi and by another 85,000 whites and 42,000 blacks in Alabama.⁴⁰

While a new socioeconomic order originated from those processes, the strategies used to mitigate or to avert them created undercurrents of resistance that have been only slowly and inadequately uncovered by historians. The different economic adaptations selected variably by Indian inhabitants of the Mississippi Territory greatly influenced impending struggles over removal, with some committed to commercial agriculture becoming the most staunch defenders of tribal homelands.⁴¹ Slaves in Mississippi and Alabama, meanwhile, continued to take economic initiatives in defiance of their owners' economic interests, maintaining a market in self-produced and pilfered goods reminiscent of earlier exchange with Indians and settlers. Although they had greater freedom of choice, nonslaveholding whites also struggled to secure a safe, albeit uneasy, relationship with the cotton export market. Becoming endemic to life in the nineteenth-century South, those widespread attempts to minimize dependence on the expanding cotton economy made the conquest of peoples and places by King Cotton more tenuous and complex than perhaps the participants themselves believed it to be. Old Carothers McCaslin bought the land, as portended by William Faulkner, "with white man's money from the wild men whose grandfathers without guns hunted it, and tamed and ordered or believed he had tamed and ordered it for the reason that the human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed the forest from it and in their sweat scratched the surface of it to a depth of perhaps fourteen inches in order to grow something out of it which had not been there before and which could be translated back into the money he who believed he had bought it had had to pay to get it and hold it."⁴²

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (2 vols., Washington, 1975), I, 24, 30; John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (Washington, 1922), 443–52.

⁴¹ This suggestion defies a general impression, produced by removal historiography, that proponents of change within Indian societies tended to accept removal. Alignments in favor of removal treaties, however, did not automatically form around people of mixed ancestry who practiced commercial agriculture. See Mary Elizabeth Young, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts, and Rednecks: Indian Allotments in Alabama and Mississippi, 1830–1860* (Norman, 1961), 3–46; and White, *Roots of Dependency*, 110–46.

⁴² William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories* (New York, 1942), 254.