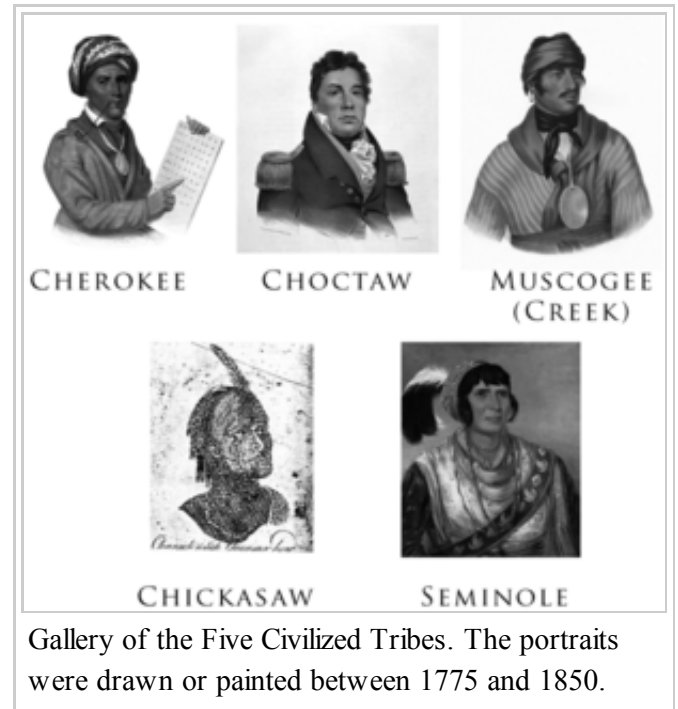


# Five Civilized Tribes

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The **Five Civilized Tribes** were the five Native American nations—the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek (Muscogee), and Seminole—that were considered civilized by Anglo-European settlers during the colonial and early federal period because they adopted many of the colonists' customs and had generally good relations with their neighbors.



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## History

George Washington and Henry Knox proposed cultural transformation for Native Americans; the Cherokee and Choctaw were successful at integrating aspects of European-American culture which they found useful.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Five Civilized Tribes were indigenous peoples of the Americas who lived in the Southeastern United States, and most were descendants of what is now called the Mississippian culture, an agrarian culture that grew crops of corn and beans, with hereditary religious and political elites, and flourished in what is now the Midwestern, Eastern, and Southeastern United States from 800 to 1500. Before European Contact these tribes were generally matriarchial societies, with agriculture being the primary economic pursuit. The bulk of the tribes lived in towns (some covering hundreds of acres and containing thousands of people) with planned streets, residential and public areas. The people were ruled by complex hereditary chiefdoms of varying size and complexity with high levels of military organization.<sup>[2]</sup> In the early part of the 19th Century, the US Government forced the Tribes to relocate, under Indian Removal, to other parts of the country, a significant number to Indian Territory, in the area that would become the future state of Oklahoma. At the time of their removal these tribes were suzerain nations with established tribal governments, well established cultures, and legal systems that allowed for slavery.

The tribes were relocated from their homes east of the Mississippi River over several decades during the series of removals known as the Trail of Tears, authorized by federal legislation. They moved to what was then called Indian Territory, now the eastern portion of the state of Oklahoma. The most infamous removal was the Cherokee Trail of Tears of 1838, when President Martin Van Buren enforced the highly contentious Treaty of New Echota with the Cherokee Nation to exchange their property for land out west.

The Five Tribes were divided in politics during the American Civil War. The Choctaw and Chickasaw fought predominantly on the Confederate side. The Creek and Seminole supported the Union, while the Cherokee fought a civil war within their own nation between the majority Confederates and the minority, pro-Union men. As an element in Reconstruction after the Civil War, new Reconstruction Treaties were signed with tribes that had previously signed treaties with the Confederate States of America.

Once the tribes had been relocated to Indian Territory, the United States government promised that their lands would be free of white settlement. Some settlers violated that with impunity, even before 1893, when the government opened the "Cherokee Strip" to outside settlement in the Oklahoma Land Run. In 1907, the Oklahoma Territory and the Indian Territory were merged to form the state of Oklahoma. All Five Civilized Tribes have a major presence there today.

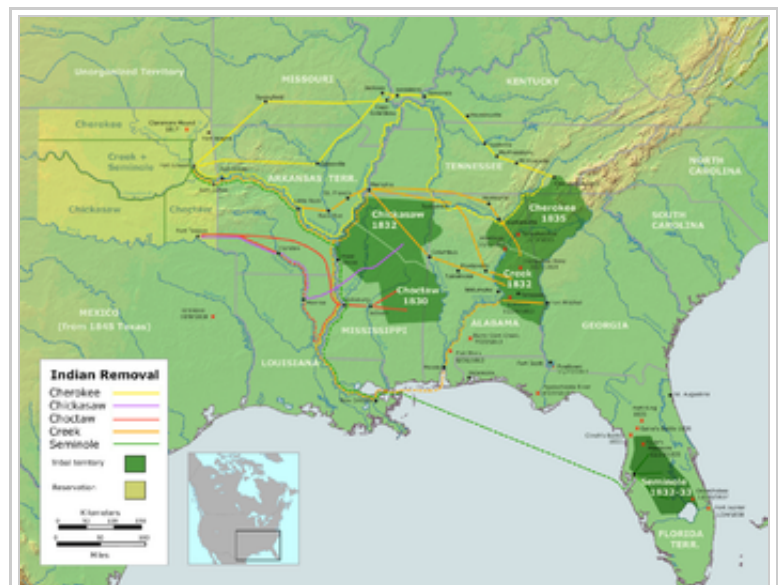
The term "civilized" as applied in this case has been considered at various times and places (for example in the writings of Vine Deloria, Jr.) as insulting or derogatory, as implying that other Native American tribes were not civilized and that the five tribes could only earn the designation of being "civilized" to the extent they took up the cultural values and ways of the European Americans. This conception of civilization was internalized within the membership of the five nations, who used it themselves.



The Mississippian culture was a mound building Native American urban culture that flourished in the South and Eastern United States before the arrival of Europeans.

## Experiment of civilizing

Washington believed that Native Americans were equals but that their society was inferior. He formulated a policy to encourage the civilizing process, and Thomas Jefferson continued it.<sup>[3]</sup> The noted Andrew Jackson historian Robert Remini wrote "they presumed that once the Indians adopted the practice of private property, built homes, farmed, educated their children, and embraced Christianity, these Native Americans would win acceptance from white Americans."<sup>[3]</sup> Washington's six-point plan included impartial justice toward Indians; regulated buying of Indian lands; promotion of commerce; promotion of experiments to *civilize* or improve Indian society; presidential authority to give *presents*; and



Routes of southern removals to the first Indian Territory of the Five Civilized Tribes.

punishing those who violated Indian rights.<sup>[4]</sup> The government appointed agents, like Benjamin Hawkins, to live among the Indians and to teach them, through example and instruction, how to live like whites.<sup>[1]</sup> The tribes of the southeast adopted Washington's policy as they established schools, adopted yeoman farming practices, converted to Christianity, and built homes like their colonial neighbors.

“ *How different would be the sensation of a philosophic mind to reflect that instead of exterminating a part of the human race by our modes of population that we had persevered through all difficulties and at last had imparted our Knowledge of cultivating and the arts, to the Aborigines of the Country by which the source of future life and happiness had been preserved and extended. But it has been conceived to be impracticable to civilize the Indians of North America – This opinion is probably more convenient than just.* ”

— Henry Knox- *Notes to George Washington from Henry Knox.*<sup>[4]</sup>



Cherokee Nation Historic Courthouse in Tahlequah, built in 1849, is the oldest public building standing in Oklahoma.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Cherokee

The Cherokee refer to themselves as *Tsa-la-gi* (pronounced "jaw la gee") or *A-ni-yv-wi-ya* (pronounced "ah knee yuh wee yaw", literal translation: "Principal People"). In 1654, the Powhatan were referring to this people as the Rickahockan. The word "Cherokee" may have originally been derived from the Choctaw trade language word "Cha-la-kee" which means "those who live in the mountains" – or (also Choctaw) "Chi-luk-ik-bi" meaning "those who live in the caves".<sup>[6]</sup> The Cherokee were called "Alligewi" by the Delawares, a name relating to the Allegheny River.<sup>[7]</sup> Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, descended from a group who avoided the forced relocation to modern-day Oklahoma, occupy a fragment of their ancestral lands known as the Qualla Boundary in western North Carolina.

## Chickasaw

The Chickasaw are Native American people of the United States, who originally resided along the Tennessee River west of Huntsville, Alabama, covering parts of Mississippi and Tennessee. Originating further west, the Chickasaw moved east of the Mississippi River long before European contact. All historical records indicate the Chickasaw were in northeastern Mississippi from the first European contact until they were forced to remove to Oklahoma, where most now live. They are related to the Choctaws, who speak a similar language, both forming the Western Group of the Muskogean languages. "Chickasaw" is the English spelling of *Chikasha* (IPA: [tʃɪkɑːʃɑː]), that either means "rebel" or "comes from Chicsa". The Chickasaw are divided in two groups: the "Impsaktea" and the "Intcutwalipa". The Chickasaws were one of the "Five Civilized Tribes" who went to the Indian Territory during the era of Indian Removal. Unlike other tribes, who exchanged land grants, the Chickasaw received financial compensation from the United States for their lands east of the Mississippi River.<sup>[8]</sup> The Chickasaw Nation is the thirteenth largest federally-recognized tribe in the United States.

## Choctaw

The **Choctaw** are a Native American people originally from the Southeastern United States (Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana). They are of the Muskogean linguistic group. The word Choctaw (also known as **Chahta**, **Chato**, **Tchakta**, and **Chocktaw**) is possibly a corruption of the Spanish *chato*, meaning flattened, in allusion to the tribe's custom of flattening the heads of infants.<sup>[9]</sup><sup>[10]</sup> Noted anthropologist John Swanton, however, suggests that the name belonged to a Choctaw leader.<sup>[11]</sup> They were descended from people of the Mississippian culture which was located throughout the Mississippi River valley. The early Spanish explorers, according to the historian Walter Williams, encountered their ancestors.<sup>[12]</sup> Although smaller Choctaw groups are located in the southern region, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians are the two primary Choctaw associations.

“ *I rejoice, brothers, to hear you propose to become cultivators of the earth for the maintenance of your families. Be assured you will support them better and with less labor, by raising stock and bread, and by spinning and weaving clothes, than by hunting. A little land cultivated, and a little labor, will procure more provisions than the most successful hunt; and a woman will clothe more by spinning and weaving, than a man by hunting. Compared with you, we are but as of yesterday in this land. Yet see how much more we have multiplied by industry, and the exercise of that reason which you possess in common with us. Follow then our example, brethren, and we will aid you with great pleasure ...* ”

—President Thomas Jefferson, Brothers of the Choctaw Nation, December 17, 1803<sup>[13]</sup>

## Muscogee Creek

The Muscogee Creek are an American Indian people originally from the southeastern United States,<sup>[14]</sup> *Mvskoke* is their name in traditional spelling. Modern Muscogee live primarily in Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Their language, *Mvskoke*, is a member of the Creek branch of the Muskogean language family. The Seminole are close kin to the Muscogee and speak a Creek language as well. The Creeks are one of the Five Civilized Tribes.

Federally recognized Creek tribes included the Muscogee Creek Nation, Poarch Band of Creek Indians in Alabama, Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town, Kialegee Tribal Town, Thlopthlocco Tribal Town, and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida.

## Seminole

The Seminole are a Native American people originally of Florida and now residing in Florida and Oklahoma. The Seminole nation came into existence in the 18th century and was composed of renegade and outcast Native Americans from Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, most significantly the Creek Nation, as well as African Americans who escaped from slavery in South Carolina and Georgia. While roughly 3,000 Seminoles were forced west of the Mississippi River, including the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, who picked up new members along the way, approximately 300 to 500 Seminoles stayed and fought in and around the Everglades of Florida. In a series of

United States wars against the Seminoles in Florida, about 1,500 U.S. soldiers died. The Seminoles never surrendered to the US government. The Seminole of Florida call themselves the "Unconquered People." Federally recognized Seminole tribes today include the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and Seminole Tribe of Florida.

## See also

- Former Indian Reservations in Oklahoma

## References

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- <sup>^</sup> Transcribed documents ([http://anpa.ualr.edu/digital\\_library/Additional%20Texts%20-%20Yuchi%20.htm](http://anpa.ualr.edu/digital_library/Additional%20Texts%20-%20Yuchi%20.htm)) Sequoyah Research Center and the American Native Press Archives

## External links

- Five Civilized Tribes Museum (<http://www.fivetribes.org/>), Muskogee, OK

- The 'Five Civilized Tribes' (<http://www.nps.gov/archive/ocmu/Tribes.htm>), National Park Service archive
- Five Civilized Tribes (<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FI011.html>), Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture

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