

In his award winning book, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, Eric Foner devoted less than two pages to post-war Indian policy. Since Foner applied the term "reconstruction" broadly to describe "the era that followed the Civil War," it is hard to account for his neglect of American Indians. By not including Indians in his book, readers may imply the Foner believed that Indians' struggle for self-preservation was a minor sideline of American history. But, the "Indian question" was an important social, intellectual, moral and political issue of the Reconstruction era. The following bibliographic essay highlights historians' major lines of inquiry on this topic.

**Southeastern Indians After the Civil War:
A Review of Literature by Wendy St. Jean**

Published in 1925, Annie H. Abel's, *The American Indian Under Reconstruction*, was the first book to explore questions relating to the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the southeastern tribes--Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Cherokees and Seminoles. In *The American Indian*, the third book of a series, Abel covered three years, 1863-66, which she described as a period of "political readjustment." In Abel's view, from the outbreak of the war, the American government eschewed "its responsibility to protect the Indians." The Union left Indian Territory vulnerable and failed to aid loyal Indians who fled to Kansas. After the war, the government aided freedmen at the expense of Indian refugees and "indigents."

According to Abel, who reflected the racist assumptions of her time, the plight of freedmen was much "exaggerated." Although the Reconstruction treaties of 1866 supposedly granted the Indians amnesty, the treaties were punitive. Reconstruction treaties led to land confiscation, "tribal dissension," "racial deterioration," "the influx of a white population outnumbering... the red." and "the running of railroads." In *The American Indian*, Abel raised key issues upon which later scholars built, such as changes in government Indian policy, as well as the destructiveness of war, the fate of freed slaves, and the ramifications of capitalist expansion in Indian Territory.

In larger tribal histories, scholars such as Angie Debo, Morris Wardell and Edwin Reynolds addressed the devastating impact of the Civil War on the southeastern Indian nations. In an introduction to the new edition of Abel's book, Theda Perdue and Michael Green summarized the historical knowledge about the impact of Civil War on the southeastern tribes in Indian Territory. While warfare destroyed the Cherokee Nation and much of the Creek and Seminole nations, the Chickasaw and Choctaw nations' geographical location and unified support for the Confederacy preserved their lands from destruction. Theft of cattle and grain depleted the economic resources of all the tribes. Tribal members who fled to Kansas were reduced in number by exposure, disease, famine and Confederate attacks. After the war, poverty, alcohol, factionalism, white intrusions and clashes with the relocated Plains tribes protracted the war's violence. For a more detailed introduction to major people, places and events of the war, Arrell Gibson's "**Native Americans and the Civil War**," is useful.

No author captures the tragedy of war better than the people themselves. Theda Perdue's collection of Works Project Administration interviews *Nations Remembered* witnessed the people's suffering and their efforts to restore normalcy. One Creek family returned from Kansas to find nothing left of their former home but an old chair and a milk cow, and they felt blessed by their small good fortune. Many people looked back on the process of rebuilding their homes, lives and families. Others reflected upon the violence -- the whipping posts, "free-for-all" fights at elections and the struggles between cattlemen and hungry Indians. To round out the picture, Perdue also presented peoples' memories of entertainment, traditions, religion and education.

Alvin M. Josephy's *Civil War in the West* integrated individual tribal studies into a broader narrative of war on the western front. Josephy's analysis of the impact of war marks his primary contribution to Reconstruction historiography. The fifth section of this volume focuses on major battles in Indian Territory, Arkansas and Missouri. After the northern armies put down Confederate units and western sectionalists, they waged an aggressive campaign against American Indians. Attacks on Indians, Josephy maintained, had nothing to do with overall Confederate policy and everything to do with conquest and Manifest Destiny. Indian was "a natural continuum of the prewar westward movement and the dispossession of Indian tribes."

Since Abel's pioneering work, historians have explored in greater detail the interrelationship between freed slaves and their former Indian masters. While the Seminoles were relatively kind to freed slaves, many Chickasaw and Choctaws subjected freed slaves to the severe racial treatment applied by southern whites. In *The Chickasaw Freedmen* Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., described "freedmen" policies in the Chickasaw Nation. As slaves' and then ostensibly as free people, blacks suffered racism, poverty and denial of their civil rights.

In "Red Versus Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907," Donald A. Grinde and Quintard Taylor synthesized most studies of the freed-slave dilemma. According to Grinde and Taylor, there were several factors which fed racial antagonism between Indians and blacks. First, Indians resented government "favoritism" toward freed slaves. Throughout the 1870's and 1880's, Indians feared the government planned to redesignate a large part of Indian Territory as an area for exclusive Afro-American settlement. Second, the Indians dreaded being overwhelmed by freedmen, who were more "prolific" in their own nations. Although freed slaves, in Indian Territory resembled Indians culturally, Indians shared whites' racism and fear of miscegenation.

Finally, Indians resented black efforts to colonize their lands. Hundreds of blacks from the surrounding southern states settled on the tribes' lands without even the pretense of joining the tribes. While ex-slaves grasped at shadows of opportunity, Indians viewed 'state Negroes' as intruders and blamed blacks for Indians' political and economic demise.

As the selected samples show, articles and books on freed slaves in Indian Territory commonly focus on policy, rather than social issues. Of the afore mentioned historians, only Abel mentioned freedwomen, whose position in Indian nations was particularly weak on account of the Indians' matrilineal system. While black men who married Indian women were made members of the tribes, black women who married Indian men were not welcomed by any tribe. The children of the former couples but not the latter were recognized as tribal members. According to Abel, many freedwomen "had numerous progeny and yet have not and never have had any husbands." To alleviate the situation of freedwomen, reconstruction treaties contained a special provision which granted forty acres of land to single women with children. Since contemporary policy makers took note of freedwomen, scholars should do the same.

A third theme of Abel's work, government policy, has remained popular among historians. Like Abel, M. Thomas Bailey only considered President Andrew Johnson's program. Bailey's *Reconstruction in Indian Territory: A Story of Avarice, Discrimination, and Opportunism* delineated the five southeastern tribes' individual negotiations with the federal government in 1866. The Seminoles, who reestablished relations with the United States first, obtained the worst settlement, whereas the Chickasaws, who signed the last treaty, secured the most concessions, including the right to *not* adopt ex-slaves as Chickasaws. Ironically, the Chickasaws were the Confederates' staunchest allies and suffered the least physical damage from the war. Loyalty to the Union did not pay, but leadership and English education did. Bailey concluded that the Reconstruction treaties served a single end: to profit the whites. The treaties circumvented the old removal treaties and concentrated other tribes in the territory, releasing additional land for white settlement.

Richard Slotkin emphasized the economic imperatives that drove Indian policy. In "The Reconstruction of Class and Racial Symbolism, 1865-1876," Slotkin argued that postwar elites used racial ideology to perpetuate inferior position of blacks, poor whites and Indians in the political and economic systems. As the distance between owners and producers grew, elites forged an ideology which rationalized mounting social and economic inequality. In Slotkin's view, American Indian policy represented the elite consensus on white male supremacy and their domination of the under classes. Postwar Indian policy reduced the legal status of Indians to that of blacks and white paupers. The Act of 1871 eliminated tribal-self-government, made Indians "wards of the state", abrogated all previous treaties, and opened up an assault on Indian land titles. Before elites would grant Indian citizenship, the former wanted to integrate Indians into their economic system as losers. Indians would have to pass "from tribesman to owner of a private allotment to (perhaps) dispossessed proletarian." Slotkin's work is impressive because it provided a context for integrating the histories of Indians, blacks and poor whites.

Abel's fourth theme, the impact of rapid economic development, is central to Indian history. As Foner noted in *Reconstruction*, "No where did capitalism penetrate more rapidly or dramatically than in the trans-Mississippi West, whose 'vast trackless spaces' were not absorbed into the expanding economy." H. Craig Minor's *The Corporation and the Indian* considered the ramifications of Reconstruction treaties that forced southern Indian nations to grant railroad rights of way. Railroad money and intrigue exploited intertribal disputes and divisions between tribal "traditionalists" and "progressives" to gain lucrative, long term leases and access to mineral rights. "Progressives" made deals with railroads which benefited them personally at the expense of the tribe. Since Chickasaws and Choctaws jointly owned lands, they fought over the amount each tribe should get paid as compensation for natural resources and the routes rails should follow. Railroads profited from the disorder, pointing to tribal feuding impeding progress as a reason to abolish tribal sovereignty. "Almost no issue discussed as a cause for change in the status of Indian Territory tribes in the 1870's," Minor wrote, "was unrelated to the introduction of railroads." Once railroads arrived, they "spawned an industrial revolution." By 1901, there were thirty-nine coal corporations and 4,600 non-citizens minors in the Choctaw Nation. Five years later, Minor noted, the Choctaw Nation was virtually gone.

Economic imperatives steered Indian policy along a steadily destructive course. Indians were not alone in their exploitation. Freed slaves and poor whites also found themselves the immediate losers of national expansion and industrialization. However, while writing of the former, most scholars have chosen to overlook Native Americans' experiences of Civil War and Reconstruction. Perhaps Americans are not ready to confront their past. As the scholars in this essay demonstrate, the Indians' post-war fate was the bitter outcome of a calculated national policy, rather than an unfortunate anomaly in the nation's forward march of progress.

From...

The Journal of Chickasaw History, Volume 2 No. 3 1996 pp. 9-13

Wendy St. Jean, at the time of this journal entry was a graduate student in history at the University of Connecticut