TWO MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FRONTIERS

By Edward Everett Dale*

In recent years we have heard much of the "American Way of Life." Those who use that expression must be thinking in terms of those fundamental rights guaranteed to us by the Constitution, or of that equality of opportunity and the right to live our own lives in our own way which is the precious heritage of every American. For if they mean the manner in which we live, the mores of a people or the social, economic and cultural pattern of life the phrase becomes meaningless. Because the American way of life in New England is quite different from that of the Deep South and in neither of these areas does it bear any marked similarity to that of the Great Plains, the Spanish Southwest, or the Pacific Coast.

This nation of ours is made up not only of states but of regions each with its own ways of life, its own customs, traditions and manner of thought. These regional cultures grow from definite roots. Some, as geographic conditions, lie close beneath the surface while others are deep in the background of history.

One of these regions is the area west of the Appalachians and east of the Mississippi between the Ohio River and the Gulf states—or Kentucky and Tennessee, the first states formed in the Mississippi Valley. The other is the former Indian Territory now Oklahoma—the last state in the Mississippi Valley to be admitted to the Union. The influence of the first area upon American history has been enormous and that of the latter comparatively slight, though the story of its settlement and development is unique in the annals of America.

Population maps of the United States showing the peopled areas at any time between 1790 and 1810 will reveal that a long tongue of settlement extended westward from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi with its northern border the Ohio River and its southern one the northern limits of the present states of Mississippi and Alabama and western Georgia or roughly Kentucky and Tennessee or portions of those states if the map is of one of the earlier dates named. For the purposes of this discussion, New Orleans and the

* Doctor Edward Everett Dale, Research Professor of History in the University of Oklahoma, is the author of several outstanding historical volumes, of which his most recent are History of United States, with D. L. Dumond and E. B. Wesley, and History of Oklahoma with M. L. Wardell, both published in New York, 1948. This paper, "Two Mississippi Valley Frontiers," was read by Doctor Dale during the annual meeting of the Mississippi Historical Association, at a dinner held in conjunction with the American Historical Association at Cleveland, Ohio, in December, 1947.—Ed.
Note the long tongue of Indian Country extending west into the settled area.

Note the long tongue of settlement extending east into the settled area.
tiny islands of French settlement in Louisiana or beyond the Ohio in Indiana or Illinois may be disregarded. Most of these latter were mere outposts in the wilderness as was Detroit, founded in 1701 by Cadillac, to be developed more than two centuries later by Ford.

The reasons for the early establishment of this wide frontier west of the mountains and south of the Ohio are not far to seek. When the English colonists of the tidewater region began the march westward they soon found their further advance toward the interior barred, or greatly hindered, by two forces. One was the formidable barrier of the mountain wall and the other was the resistance of many powerful tribes of Indians. When the advancing tide of population reached the mountains opposite Kentucky, however, both of these barriers gave way. Eventually Cumberland Gap was discovered offering a comparatively easy passageway through the mountains and beyond and extending as far west as the Mississippi was a broad region which was not inhabited by any tribe of Indians. Kentucky and much of Tennessee constituted virtually a "no man's land." North of the Ohio were the fierce Shawnee, the Potawatomi, Sac and Fox, Miami, and other tribes, while in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi were the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws. Far to the south in Florida were the Seminoles who formed the fifth and smallest of these so-called Five Civilized Tribes. Many of these Indians used the middle region as a hunting ground but no tribe of importance occupied it permanently.

In 1769 Daniel Boone pushed westward through Cumberland Gap to view with delight the verdant meadows and beautiful groves of Kentucky. Those who have visited the blue grass region and above all those born and bred there are not surprised that Boone lingered on this "long hunt" for nearly three years. They only wonder why he should ever have returned to Virginia! The lure of the West was too powerful, however, to permit him to remain long in his old homeland. In 1775 he led a party of settlers back to Kentucky and founded Boonesborough.¹

Daniel Boone was a type. Perhaps others like him did as much as he to explore and open up this middle region to settlement but above all others he has caught the popular fancy. Boone and those of his kind, as Kenton, Harrod, Bryan, Crockett and others, loved pioneering for its own sake. They sought new lands not so much for the purpose of settling and developing them as to escape from what they regarded as the penalties and inconveniences of civilization. They were of the type described by Kipling when he wrote:

¹ R. G. Thwaites, Daniel Boone, p. 118.
He shall desire loneliness
And his desire shall bring
Hard on his heels a thousand wheels
A people and a King
He shall go back on his own track
And by his scarce cold camp
There he shall meet the roaring street
The derrick and the stamp.

A thousand wheels did not follow in the wake of these vanguards of the frontier because the mountain trails were for a long time impassible for wheeled vehicles. But there did come a people with their scanty possessions loaded on pack horses. Moreover, if these people did not bring in a king they eventually brought those things which a king is supposed to typify—law, and constitutional forms, and more or less orderly government.

Following the first pioneer explorers there poured through Cumberland Gap in the years of the Revolution and thereafter thousands of settlers eagerly seeking homes where they might improve their worldly condition and build up a heritage for their children. Some floated down the Ohio River. This was a long voyage during which the scow or keel boat was kept in the middle of the current to avoid attack by bands of Indians lurking in the forest along its northern bank. These immigrants came across the mountains or down the river in ever increasing numbers with the result that by 1792 Kentucky’s population was sufficient for its admission as a state. Four years later the settlers of Tennessee formed a constitution without bothering to ask the consent of Congress and it was also admitted to the Union.

The people who came to occupy this exposed frontier prior to the admission of Kentucky and Tennessee to statehood and long thereafter and who survived to develop that region all had the same characteristics. As a rule they were young and were of the strongest and most hardy and aggressive type. It required courage to set out on the long journey across the mountains or down the Ohio River to occupy this remote land behind the Appalachians. Also when they had arrived, it was necessary to maintain themselves in a region where, as Felix Grundy said: "Death lurked behind almost every bush and every thicket concealed an ambuscade."

When Longfellow referring to the settlers of Plymouth wrote:

God had sifted three kingdoms
To find the wheat for this planting
Then had sifted the wheat
The living seed of a nation

he was but voicing a general truth as applicable to the settlers of all later American frontiers as it was to the militant Pilgrims. The bold, hardy, and adventurous migrated. The timid, weak, and satisfied remained at home. As a later writer has put it: "The cowards did
not start; the weaklings did not survive." Or, as an old ranchman in the Far West once said with true frontier modesty: "We were a picked bunch in those old days. The wilderness cut out the culls."

Be that as it may, few will deny that the pioneers who occupied each successive frontier of America were of a bold and aggressive breed but conditions made this especially true in this area of Kentucky and Tennessee. Cut off by the mountains from any support from the East, the people of this long salient of settlement were to use a military term, enfiladed by hostile Indians. Among the tribes north of the Ohio River were some made up of as savage and warlike Indians as could be found on the North American Continent. It was not, merely blind fury which prompted them to write the story of Kentucky's history in blood for so many years. Such leaders as Tecumseh were astute, far-seeing men. They realized the danger to their people of this long tongue of white settlement extending far out into the wilderness. Unless these settlements could be destroyed they would inevitably grow larger, be extended across the Ohio, and continue north until they met and merged with the population steadily advancing westward from New York, Pennsylvania, and eastern Ohio. Then the Indians would be dispossessed of their lands and those who survived driven beyond the Mississippi to face an uncertain future. It was not enough to fight a defensive warfare. These presumptuous whites must perish or be driven out. With tireless energy these Indian leaders led their painted warriors against the little settlements of Kentucky in a desperate attempt to blot them out and "let in the jungle." The struggle continued for many years and in this period the "wheat was truly sifted." Eternal vigilance was for these pioneers the price of survival. They established forts and palisaded stations, carried their guns to the field, and learned every art and trick of savage warfare. They matched skill with skill, cunning with cunning, and at times cruelty with cruelty.²

Coupled with the ever-present danger from the Indians beyond the Ohio to the people of the northern portion of this frontier area, however, was an almost equally grave danger to those settlers in its southern portion from Indians to the south. The great tribes south of Tennessee, as the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw, were far more civilized and perhaps less warlike than were the Indians north of the Ohio. On the other hand they were much more numerous. Moreover, they viewed these white settlements with suspicion and were always ready to resist any encroachment, or threatened encroachment, on their lands. While they did not engage in as many bloody forays as did the Shawnee and some other northern tribes, they were a powerful barrier to the advance of population to the south. Also bands sometimes attacked the settlers and always they were a potential menace to the whites.

The situation of these westerners was rendered more perilous by the fact that behind the Indian tribes on either side of them lay the colonial possessions of two great European nations. Far to the north lay Canada and for a long time there were also British posts on the American side of the Great Lakes. That British officials deliberately encouraged the Indians to attack these settlements seems doubtful but they encouraged the savages to resist any expansion of population northward. British traders unquestionably sold guns and powder to the Indians just as did American traders half a century or more later in our own western territories. It is not surprising therefore that a deep resentment toward the British should have grown up among these people of the West.

To the south the Spaniards also sought to cultivate friendship with the Indians of the Five Civilized Tribes. Traders in Spanish Louisiana sold these Indians arms and ammunition and Spain’s officials in Louisiana urged the Indians to oppose any advance of the American pioneers southward. Hemmed in on both sides by Indians who were backed by these great European powers, the position of the pioneers of the Kentucky-Tennessee area was truly perilous. Only a people of rare courage, fortitude, and remarkable intelligence could survive in such a situation.

Yet the fact that the colonies of these two European nations hung on the flanks of these western settlements was not an unmixed evil. It prevented the people of the long salient behind the mountains from becoming provincial backwoodsmen. Cut off by the mountains from a market in the East for their surplus products, these westerners felt an urgent need for the free navigation of the Mississippi which Spain for many years denied them. The man dwelling in a log cabin on the banks of the Ohio, Tennessee, Cumberland, or any one of many other rivers had a personal interest in Jay’s treaty with England as well as in the political situation in Spain and in the acts of the Spanish government. Whether or not Manuel Godoy remained the chief minister of Spain, or Charles IV abdicated in favor of his son, Ferdinand, were to the Kentucky settler matters of vital importance. He and his fellows loudly demanded that Spain be persuaded or forced to grant to them the right to navigate the Mississippi. This they secured by the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795. They felt, however, that their tenure of this right was most precarious and as additional settlers poured in, the demands grew for the Federal government to make it secure by the purchase of a portion of Louisiana. This log cabin dweller was therefore deeply interested in the transfer of Louisiana to France by Spain and in the negotiations of Livingston and Monroe culminating in the Louisiana Purchase.

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5 Ibid., pp. 516-523.
With access to markets thus assured and lands provided for further expansion westward, the population rapidly increased. The Indian menace still remained, however, and the newcomers were also of a hardy and adventurous type. Yet a differentiated society eventually began to develop. Men of means began to acquire the best lands and to cultivate them with slave labor. Some earlier settlers who sold their lands crossed the Ohio. It was plain that expansion in that direction would in time reach the lakes and demands grew for securing a northern outlet to the sea just as the southern one had been acquired. Resentment against British support of the Indians increased and some men began to dream of the acquisition of Canada.

These westerners played a conspicuous part in the Indian war against Tecumseh but by this time they had become powerful enough to wield an influence upon national politics. As the old Revolutionary War statesmen passed out of the picture, many of them were replaced by new leaders from this area. Henry Clay was chosen Speaker of the House in 1811. On the question of war with Great Britain the western representatives in Congress voted unanimously in favor of it, joining with the South for a war which New England strongly opposed and on the question of which the middle states were divided.

The frontier leaders, however, had no intention of favoring a war for others to fight. Kentucky-born Richard M. Johnson elected to Congress at the age of twenty-five left Washington and hurried west to lead a regiment of volunteers in the invasion of Canada. Having been granted his commission by Governor Isaac Shelby of that State, he and the Governor both played a conspicuous part in the Battle of the Thames. Johnson then returned to his seat in Congress. Many of Harrison’s soldiers in this invasion were Kentucky or Tennessee men just as were many of Jackson’s in the South in his campaign against the Creeks and at New Orleans. In fact, about the only important American victories of this war were won in the West and that region furnished its only military heroes—Jackson and Harrison—together with a number of lesser lights.

Great as was the influence of this frontier Kentucky-Tennessee area on the war, it also had its influence on the peace. Henry Clay of Kentucky together with Gallatin, Bayard, Russell, and John Quincy Adams negotiated the Peace of Ghent and for once we seem to have done better around the peace table than on the field of battle. It might almost be said that in the second conflict with Great Britain we lost a war and won a peace. If there is some element of the truth in the old saying that “Waterloo was won on the cricket fields of Eton,” there is also some justification for asserting that the Peace of Ghent was won about the sales stables, race tracks, and poker tables of Kentucky. The British commissioners, Lord Gambier, Sir Henry Goulburn and William Adams were second-raters since the talents

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of Britain’s leading diplomats were required for solving the problems of the Congress of Vienna. Certainly these three commissioners were no match for Clay, Adams, and Gallatin. Henry Clay’s influence with his colleagues was great and he brought to play in the negotiations all the skill of the western horse trader and poker player. With rare skill he made the American offers appear attractive, and alternately bluffed, “stood pat,” “raised the ante,” or “called the bluff” of his opponents. When a deadlock was reached, the Americans again and again said: “Consult your government” and Britain desperately weary of war repeatedly yielded. As a result a treaty was at last negotiated far more favorable to the United States than our people had any right to expect.\(^7\)

After the close of the war, western migration greatly increased. The Kentucky-Tennessee area was soon fully occupied and the population began to spill over its borders in ever-increasing numbers. The southern portion of the region north of the Ohio was settled by people from this area. Also the Southwest below Tennessee received a flood of settlers from this region while others crossed the Mississippi to occupy Missouri and portions of Arkansas.

While part of the increased population of the Kentucky-Tennessee region was due to immigration, a high birthrate was responsible for much of it since a dozen children was hardly an exceptionally large family. Now with the danger of Indian attack removed, and with increased prosperity, the people of this first frontier beyond the mountains were free to give more attention to national affairs. No longer forced to carry on Indian campaigns, they turned their attention to political campaigns. Moreover, they brought to political conflicts all of the aggressive qualities, hardihood, and strength developed by long conflict with the wilderness and its savage inhabitants. Soon it was apparent that a new political power had appeared and was eagerly reaching for the reins of government.

The election of 1824 brought to an end the era of the Virginia Dynasty which for thirty-two of the thirty-six years of government under the Constitution had occupied the executive mansion. Only the aggressive individualism which led them to fight among themselves prevented the people of this first trans-Appalachian frontier from securing the Presidency in 1824. Able as were the Adamses of New England, however, their personal qualities did not appeal to the people of the New America that was so fast developing. These people felt that four years was as long as they would tolerate an Adams in the White House. Then with Jackson’s triumph in 1828, the political dominance of this first Mississippi Valley frontier had to be recognized. Moreover, from this time forward for a generation

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\(^7\) See Henry Adams, *History of United States*, Book IX, Chs. 1 and 2, for discussion of the negotiations at Ghent. For the treaty, see Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 575.
the states of Tennessee and Kentucky and their colonies largely ruled
the nation.

Perhaps few will deny that this was true during the eight
years of the "reign of Andrew Jackson" but a question may be
raised as to his successor. If so, it should be pointed out that Van
Buren was the "heir apparent" to the throne, or the creature of
Andrew Jackson. Moreover, Van Buren's running mate was Colonel
Richard M. Johnson, veteran soldier and statesman of Kentucky.

Van Buren's successor, William Henry Harrison, was not from
the Kentucky-Tennessee area but he had all the qualities which the
people of that region most admired. He was every inch a frontiers-
man and it might be said that upon his shoulders had fallen the
mantle of Jackson. He had endeared himself to the people of Ken-
tucky by his work in the Northwest and had led many of them at
Tippecanoe. In 1812 he had been commissioned a major general in
the Kentucky militia and as has already been said, many Kentuckians
were with him at the Battle of the Thames including Colonel Johnson
and Governor Isaac Shelby.8

His successor, John Tyler, was an accident and may be disre-
garded here just as he usually was when President. Then came
James K. Polk of Tennessee, who defeated the perennial candidate,
Henry Clay of Kentucky. Polk was not colorful enough for the
westerners. Happy as they were over his acquisition of territory,
he apparently had little sense of humor and it was difficult for
either the first or secondary frontier to grow enthusiastic over a dour
Scotch Presbyterian. Zachary Taylor, or "Old Rough and Ready"
seemed a far more attractive figure. He was a professional soldier
born in 1784 in Virginia while his parents were journeying west to
settle in Kentucky. In 1785 he was brought to the vicinity of Louis-
ville when Zachary was only eight months old and here he grew to
manhood when this region was truly a "dark and bloody ground." Not
until he was twenty-four years old did he leave Kentucky after
accepting a commission in the Army. From this time his life was
largely that of a frontier soldier. His character and characteristics
were formed, however, during the nearly twenty-four years of life
in frontier Kentucky.9

Fillmore was another accident and Pierce an incident. Then the
American people decided to try again the nearly-forgotten experiment
of electing to the Presidency a man of ample training and experience
in government, politics and diplomacy. This they did when they
chose James Buchanan. Soon convinced of their mistake, they in
1860 elected a Kentucky-born, former rail splitter Abraham Lincoln,
two of whose opponents were John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky and

9 Dictionary of American Biography, XVIII, p. 349; also Lossing, op. cit., p. 353.
James Bell of Tennessee. Moreover, it will be remembered that Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, was also Kentucky born, and that Andrew Johnson of Tennessee succeeded to the Presidency when Lincoln was murdered. With Johnson came the end of an era and the beginning of the period of the political supremacy of the Old Northwest, especially Ohio and Indiana, which is another story.

It has been possible to mention only a few of the men important in national affairs contributed by this first trans-mountain frontier region. Among others were Hugh White, Felix Grundy, Thomas Hart Benton, George Rogers Clark and his younger brother William, J. J. Crittenden, George Croghan, and many more.

In addition many men from this area pushed out into the great Southwest especially Texas. These included David Crockett, one-time member of Congress from Tennessee whose restless love of adventure took him to Texas to die at the Alamo. Also William Walker, the filibuster, and Sam Houston who resigned the governorship of Tennessee and journeyed westward to the Indian Territory. Here he lived with the Cherokees for some years before going to Texas to command its armies in the war for independence. Most men regard election to Congress, the United States Senate, or the governorship of a state as the crowning achievement of a lifetime. Sam Houston was Governor of two states, member of Congress from one and United States Senator from another, was Commander-in-Chief of the armies of a nation and twice President of a republic. In addition, he married three wives and his youngest son Temple was born when Sam was seventy years of age. Surely if the Cow Country could boast that its “men were men” Tennessee might well retort that some of her own sons also had some claims to manhood! As a matter of fact, many of the militant pioneers of Texas and other parts of the Trans-Mississippi West were transplanted from Kentucky or Tennessee soil and the spirit of daring and toughness of fiber revealed in the land of their adoption had been developed in the land of their birth.

That this Kentucky-Tennessee region, which was the first important Mississippi Valley frontier, has exerted an influence upon the history of the United States out of all proportion to its size seems reasonably apparent. It is clear that the reason for the political dominance of this area must be sought in the type of settlers who migrated to it and to qualities developed in them by their experiences during the formative years of these states. The second area to be discussed is the last frontier region of the Mississippi Valley, or the present state of Oklahoma.

A survey of the population map of the United States as it was a hundred years after the adoption of the Constitution will show

10 See Marquis James, The Raven, for a very interesting biography of Houston.
a pattern of peopled and unpeopled lands exactly the converse of a population map for 1800. A map for 1889 shows that settlement stopped short at the western boundary of Arkansas but in Kansas and south of the Red River in Texas continued westward to about the hundredth meridian which forms the western boundary of Oklahoma. East of this meridian between the southern line of Kansas and the Red River which marks the northern limits of Texas, a broad salient of Indian lands thrust far back into a sea of settlement just as three-quarters of a century earlier such a map showed a long tongue of settlement in Kentucky and Tennessee reaching far out into the Indian country.

This peninsula of Indian lands over two hundred miles wide and with an area approximately that of all New England, or slightly less than the combined areas of Ohio and Indiana, was the Indian Territory now the state of Oklahoma. In 1888 no white person held legal title to a single acre of land within its limits and the total Indian population was only some 75,000 of which more than four-fifths belonged to the Five Civilized Tribes.

The reasons for the formation of this long salient of near wilderness extending back into the lands occupied by a white population are as definite as are those for the extension of the Kentucky-Tennessee area of settlement far out into the unpeopled lands of the Mississippi Valley. Virtually this entire region had been granted to the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians and they had been removed to it from their old homeland in the Gulf Plains between 1820 and 1840. This area had been promised to them for "as long as grass grows and water runs" and whites were forbidden to live within the limits of the territory of any tribe except by the consent of the Indians themselves. Thus a wall had been placed about this great Indian Territory by governmental decree—an intangible wall—but none the less real because of that.

Even at the time of their removal four of the five great tribes to which this territory had been granted had attained a considerable degree of civilization due to long contact with the whites. These four tribes, the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw had for centuries occupied in their old homeland east of the Mississippi what might be described as a strategic region. They held the headwaters of the tributaries of the lower Mississippi, as well as of those streams which flow south into the Gulf and they also guarded the passes through the southern Appalachians. It was inevitable, therefore, that any nation which sought to hold the mouth of the Mississippi and the shores of the Gulf of Mexico must reckon with these powerful tribes.

Three European nations sought to do this—the Spaniards in Florida, the French in Louisiana, and the English in Georgia. The colonists of these nations early sought alliances with these tribes and zealously sought to secure their favor. As a result the Indians
soon learned to play one nation off against the other and to secure presents, concessions, and favors from all three without the slightest intention of allying themselves with any one of them. In the practice of this crude but effective form of diplomacy the Indians received training in the arts of diplomacy and political intrigue which they later used with telling effect against officials of the United States in negotiations for the removal of these tribes to the West.

By the time of removal there had been considerable intermarriage of Indian women with the white men who made their homes in the Indian country, and as a result every tribe except the Seminole had a number of mixed-bloods. The mixed-bloods as well as some full-bloods were in many cases well educated—some having attended schools or colleges in the East. Commissioners of the United States government sent to make removal treaties urged that in this new land beyond the Mississippi there was an abundance of game and the Indians might there continue the old hunting life of earlier days. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, it was the well-educated Indians, including many mixed-bloods, who signed such treaties against the bitter opposition of the unlettered fullbloods. The latter who clung most closely to the old Indian life of hunting and subsisting on native products were the ones most reluctant to leave the land of their fathers.

Bitter criticism has been heaped upon those Indians who negotiated treaties for the surrender of all lands in the East and removal to far-off Indian Territory. There is evidence, however, that these men were motivated solely by a desire to advance the welfare of their people. Here they saw the untutored fullbloods subject to the influence of the worst element of the frontier whites who encroached upon their lands, plied them with liquor, and corrupted their women. Unable to understand this strange new civilization, these bewildered fullbloods were in a fair way to become a race of drunken outcasts. What the leaders felt was urgently needed was time—time to establish schools to educate their unfortunate kinsmen and teach them the ways of white civilization. Given two or three generations in a land remote from the corrupting influence of whites, this might be done and these people made competent to maintain themselves in the midst of a white civilization once it had again overtaken them.11

On no other basis can be explained the provision for large funds for education which the Indian negotiators insisted must be included in the removal treaties, nor the feverish energy with which they established schools once the new homeland was reached. Each of the larger tribes set up an educational system immediately upon its arrival in the Indian Territory. Boarding schools or academies were

11 See Ralph H. Gabriel, Elias Boudinot, Cherokee, and His America, pp. 141-155, for evidence that this was the attitude of the Cherokee signers of the Treaty of New Echota.
created modeled upon those of the South and supported by funds from the tribal government. All instruction was in English and the teachers were the best qualified men and women that could be found.¹²

In 1848 the Cherokees had established two national seminaries—one for men and the other for women. In these were taught Greek, Latin, English literature, higher mathematics, music and science. Many young men and women received in these, or the Choctaw academies, the beginnings of a classical education which they completed in some eastern college as Princeton or Mount Holyoke.

The establishment of an educational system was made possible because these so called “Indian Nations” after their removal westward were hardly Indian tribes in the commonly accepted use of that term. They were very small republics under the protection of the United States. Each of them, with the exception of the Seminole, had a written constitution and written laws. The tribal governments had power of life and death over their own citizens and almost complete authority to administer the affairs of their people.¹² In fact, these tribes were independent nations except for such limitations as were expressed in the treaties of cession and removal. Lands were held in common as a public domain but with individual use guaranteed to every citizen.

Here, for some three-quarters of a century these little Indian nations lay like an American Balkans set down in the midst of the United States. Slaves were held in every tribe and with the outbreak of the War Between the States these Indian republics all made treaties of alliance with the Confederacy. As a result they were at the close of the war compelled to free their slaves and make provisions for them to share in the tribal lands. In addition, they were forced to surrender the western half of the Indian Territory in order to provide a home for other Indian tribes.¹³

Between 1866 and 1885 more than a dozen tribes from various parts of the West were brought to these ceded lands and given large reservations there. The Indian Territory thus became divided into two parts of nearly equal size. The eastern half was occupied by the quasi-independent nations of the Five Civilized Tribes while the western half consisted largely of great Indian reservations assigned to tribes brought in from Kansas or other parts of the Prairie West.

During the war the lands of the Five Civilized Tribes were so ravaged by the armies of both North and South, that at its close these Indians were in a deplorable condition. One-third of the adult Cherokee women were widows and an almost equal fraction of the children orphans. In the other tribes the situation was little better.

¹² For the tribal constitutions see Oklahoma Red Book, I, p. 201-237.
¹³ For Treaties of 1866, see Ibid., pp. 341-379.
All educational progress was stopped with the outbreak of war and during its course most of the school buildings were burned or badly damaged. With the coming of peace, however, these buildings were rebuilt or repaired and the Indian leaders resumed with vigor the task of educating their people sufficiently to enable them to live and compete with the whites on equal terms once the advancing flood of settlement should overflow their little nations.

The advance of white population, however, was more rapid than the Indian leaders had believed to be possible. In the twenty years from 1870 to 1890 the population of Kansas increased from 364,000 to 1,427,000 and Texas from 818,000 to 2,335,000 with corresponding increases in most of the neighboring western states. It was inevitable that as fertile lands subject to settlement grew increasingly scarce, many persons along the border of Indian Territory should view its attractive lands with covetous eyes and demand that they be made available for occupation by white settlers. By the middle 1870's such persons were urging Congress to devise some means by which the treaties guaranteeing their lands to the Five Civilized Tribes might be abrogated or so modified as to permit the entrance of whites. Loudly they demanded that the tribal governments be abolished, each Indian allotted a tract of land from the common holdings, the remaining lands opened to white settlement, and a territorial government established.

The Indian leaders felt that at all hazards this must be prevented. Some have asserted that this was due to their reluctance to give up their offices in the tribal governments and the economic advantages accruing to them by virtue of the communal land system. This may have been true in the case of some but there were others whose reasons for objecting to such changes were far more altruistic. Educational progress, even though interrupted by the war, had been great but the majority of the fullbloods were not yet sufficiently advanced to live among whites and compete with them economically in a white man's world. Time, and yet more time was needed and to secure it they determined to resist to the utmost the efforts of the whites to destroy their governments and overrun their country. Moreover, they brought to the task all the political wisdom and statecraft accumulated in conducting their own governments plus all the skill in diplomacy which they had acquired during the long period in which Spain, France, and England had sought alliances with them in a struggle for supremacy on the North American Continent.

The Indian leaders braced themselves in the struggle and for a quarter of a century fought desperately to hold the line against the population that strove to break it down and let in the white man's laws, government, and way of life. The situation, curiously enough, was the exact opposite of that in the Kentucky-Tennessee area a

14 Figures are from the Census.
century earlier when painted warriors for so long stormed against this long peninsula of white settlement seeking to break it down and let in the wilderness. In both cases the Indians were foredoomed to defeat. Yet despite the small population of the Five Civilized Tribes their long experience in diplomacy and political intrigue enabled them for a quarter of a century to resist the ever-increasing pressure of the whites upon the intangible wall about the Indian country.

Each of these tribes maintained a delegation in Washington to look after relations with the United States and seek to prevent any action by Congress or the executive branch of the Federal Government prejudicial to the interests of its people.

In their struggle against white invasion the Five Civilized Tribes received little help from the Indians on the reservations in western Indian Territory. Most of these tribes were small, unorganized, and little civilized. In consequence it was in this region that the barrier to entrance by settlers was first broken. In 1889 an area of some two million acres was opened to occupation by homesteaders. The following year Oklahoma Territory was created. Then one by one these western tribes agreed to take allotments of land in severalty and sell the surplus to the United States to be opened to white settlement. Within a dozen years after the first opening in 1889 virtually all of these lands ceded by the Five Civilized Tribes in 1866 as a home for other Indians had been occupied by white settlers. The western half of the former peninsula of wilderness had been blotted out and the territory of the five Indian republics had become an island in the midst of white civilization.

Still the Indians of the Five Tribes carried on their losing struggle to maintain their national integrity. By this time, however, there were forces within to lend aid and encouragement to those without. Prior to the War Between the States many Indians in each of these tribes were slave owners. The communal land system made it easy for some of these to develop large plantations which they cultivated by slave labor. Eventually a plantation aristocracy grew up not unlike that of the Old South.

When the slaves were freed, these men were left without labor to farm their extensive holdings. After the ravages of war had been somewhat repaired, some of these plantation owners sought for a new source of labor and found it in the poorer whites of Arkansas and Texas. At the request of the planter, the tribal government issued permits to whites to come in for a year to work as laborers. These laborers frequently received a share of the crops grown by them instead of a cash wage and so became in reality sharecroppers. Their permits were renewed from year to year until they became virtually

16 Ibid., pp. 426-437.
permanent residents. Permits were issued to others to live in the Indian country and operate stores, mills, or cotton gins. The building of railroads brought in railway employees and the opening of coal mines brought in still more “citizens of the United States” as they were called.

Before the close of the Nineteenth Century, the whites in the Territory of the Five Civilized Tribes far outnumbered the Indians. Yet the latter owned all the land, operated the governments and were in consequence the ruling class. The whites were merely tenants subject to the will of the tribal authorities. Except in the case of intermarried citizens, they had no public schools for their children, could not own land, vote, or share in any way in the Indian governments. In short, they were merely residents and might be removed at any time by the tribal authorities. The need for their services was so great, however, that the time came when a wholesale removal of them was unthinkable. Yet their presence made the struggle of the Indians to preserve their tribal forms and system of common land holding more difficult since to assaults from without were added the activities of this enormous “fifth column” within. The story is far too long to give in detail. In 1893 a commission was created by Congress to negotiate agreements with the Five Civilized Tribes looking to the distribution of their lands in severality and the abolition of the tribal governments. The Indians flatly refused to negotiate but the sands of time were fast running out for their little republics. Congress clothed the commission with additional powers. The tribal lands were surveyed and classified and rolls of the citizens of these tribes made up in preparation for an equitable distribution of the common property. The jurisdiction of the Federal courts was extended over the Indian Territory and the tribal courts forbidden to function. At last the Indians yielded to superior force, signed agreements to accept all that had been done, and agreed to the allotment of the tribal lands in severalty.

In 1906 Congress passed an enabling act providing for the joining of Oklahoma and Indian Territories to form the State of Oklahoma and authorizing the election of delegates to a convention to make a constitution for the new state. The constitution was formed, ratified by an overwhelming majority, and state and county officers elected.

November 16, 1907, was the date set for the inauguration of the Governor and their officials and on which the new state government was to go into operation. On that day the inaugural ceremonies

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17 It is quite impossible to list all of the numerous articles that have appeared in The Chronicles of Oklahoma dealing with matters referred to in the latter part of this paper. Earlier issues should be consulted by the reader interested in details of life in the Indian Territory and relations between Indians and whites.

18 See Oklahoma Red Book, I, pp. 481-485, for the various acts with respect to the Dawes Commission.

19 Ibid., pp. 559-517.
held at the capital were witnessed by a huge throng of people while every important town in the state also arranged for a celebration in honor of the coming of statehood. Each of these was attended by swarms of happy people coming for many miles from every part of the surrounding country. Only one group was absent. Within the limits of the former republics of the Five Civilized Tribes many of the older Indians remained at home to mourn the passing of the old governments and the old order under which they had so long lived and which they so much loved.

Thirty years later a Cherokee woman married to a white man said that her husband had asked her to go with him to attend the statehood celebration at the nearby town but she had refused. Late that evening he returned home and said: ‘‘Well, Mary, we no longer live in the Cherokee Nation. All of us are now citizens of the State of Oklahoma.’’ After the lapse of more than thirty years there were tears in this woman’s eyes as she recalled that never-to-be-forgotten day. She said: ‘‘It broke my heart. I went to bed and cried all night long. It seemed more than I could bear that the Cherokee Nation—my country and my people’s country—was no more.’’

Though the Indians had lost the cause for which they had so long battled, the years of struggle had done their work. It had given to their leaders a training in politics, statecraft, and diplomacy which has made them among the cleverest and most able politicians in the state of Oklahoma or almost any other state. This training had, moreover, been built upon a heritage of political skill dating back to the eighteenth century.

Conscious of their political ability and of the fact that they had long been owners of all land tilled by their white tenants, these Indian leaders had no intention of accepting an inferior status for themselves or their people in the new state. The President of the Constitutional Convention was not an Indian but he was an intermarried citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and in consequence, his children were of Indian blood. A number of Indians served as members of this convention and may have been in part responsible for the section in the Constitution defining races which says: ‘‘Wherever in this Constitution and laws of this state the word or words ‘colored’ or ‘colored race’ . . . . are used, the same shall be construed to mean or apply to all persons of African descent. The term ‘white race’ shall include all other persons.’’ Thus every Indian, no matter how dark his skin, is a white person as defined by the Oklahoma Constitution.

At the time of Oklahoma’s admission as a State in 1907 slightly less than five per cent of its population was of Indian blood and about that ratio has been maintained for forty years. In 1947 the number of Indians in the state was some 120,000 of a total population of around 2,300,000. Yet these people of Indian descent who are but

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30 Oklahoma Constitution, Art. XXIII, Sec. 11.
five per cent of Oklahoma’s total population have contributed to the state leaders and prominent men and women, especially in the field of politics and government, out of all proportion to their numbers. None of the thirteen governors of the state to 1948 has been of Indian blood but two were intermarried citizens so their children are of Indian blood. One of the first two United States Senators was Indian, the late Robert L. Owen, and every Oklahoma delegation in Congress has had at least one member of Indian descent, sometimes two, and occasionally three. Two speakers of the lower house of the state legislature have been Indians and many of its most prominent members as well as many state senators have been of Indian blood. One of the three members of the Corporation Commission in 1948 is Indian and Indians have served as members of the Supreme Court and as district judges. With but one exception, every county superintendent of schools of one eastern Oklahoma county for forty years has been Indian and most other officials of this and other counties have been of Indian descent.

It is not alone in the field of politics and government that these Indian people have made important contributions. Among them have been writers, artists, musicians, teachers and ministers, as well as prominent lawyers, physicians, editors, bankers, and merchants. They have also been active in many organizations. The late Mrs. Roberta Lawson, one time President of the American Federation of Women’s Clubs, was the granddaughter of a famous Indian. It is also significant that the two statues which Oklahoma has placed in the Hall of Fame in our national capitol as those of her two greatest sons are both of Cherokee Indians—Sequoyah and Will Rogers. A people numbering less than five per cent of Oklahoma’s total population have given to the state perhaps twenty to twenty-five per cent of its best known men and women.

It may be asserted that most of these prominent individuals have been mixed bloods and should not be designated as Indians. Yet they are all included in the five per cent of the state’s population of Indian descent. Also, ever since Oklahoma’s admission to the Union, the state’s politics have been dominated by the people of its eastern half, the area of the Five Civilized Tribes.

Enough has been given to show that the early history of Oklahoma—the last state created in the Mississippi Valley—has been as colorful as that of the first two states formed beyond the Appalachians. That the settlers of the Kentucky-Tennessee area for a generation were in constant conflict with the Indians and during the succeeding generation wielded an enormous influence in the national government few persons will deny. Most students of Oklahoma history will also agree that the Indians of the Five Civilized Tribes fought desperately for a generation to preserve their status as independent nations and for another generation have had an enormous influence in Oklahoma politics and government.
Whether or not the historian will accept the view that in both cases political power and influence stemmed from the strength developed in earlier conflicts is another matter. Yet few things worthy of recording in the annals of a nation merely happen. The multiple threads which make up the fabric of history have always been woven by vital forces in such fashion as to reveal a more or less distinct pattern. If the conclusion here suggested should appear unjustified, it is hoped that they may at least be deemed worthy of consideration.