

The Logistics of the Land Theft

Historical contextualization and examination of UNC's relationship to Indigenous land theft

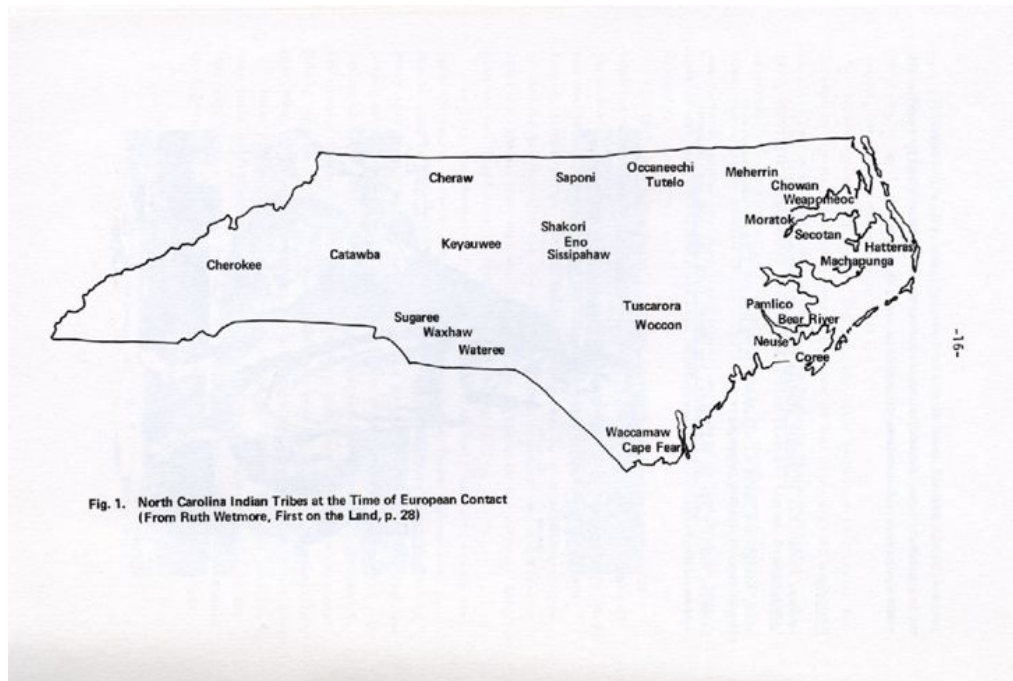
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Who Originally Occupied the Land?

When the Roanoke colony was established in 1585, the land encompassing modern-day North Carolina was home to more than one hundred thousand native Americans and more than thirty distinct tribes. The Eno, Shakori, Sissipahaw, and Tuscarora inhabited the land that UNC Chapel Hill would be built on. The most prominent of these tribes was the Tuscarora, who fled from North Carolina in 1720 to escape. They fled to New York to

become one of the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy in 1722. Today, members of the Occaneechi tribe occupy Orange County, as well as surrounding Caswell and Alamance counties. The land that would be granted to UNC by the Morrill Act of 1862 was occupied by the Chicksaw nation. After the Chicksaw were thrown off the land, it was made into a state park in 1955. Currently, there are no state-recognized tribes in Tennessee. There are, however, two organizations that are affiliated with federally-recognized tribes: the Choctaw community in Lauderdale county and the Muscogee “Creek” Nation Citizens.



Native American tribes in North Carolina at the time of European contact (1585) (Wetmore, 1975)

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A shift in governmental policies was brought about by Andrew Jackson's election as president in 1828. Jackson was committed to displacing the last tribes from the east and relocating them in

the west as part of his goals for the United States.

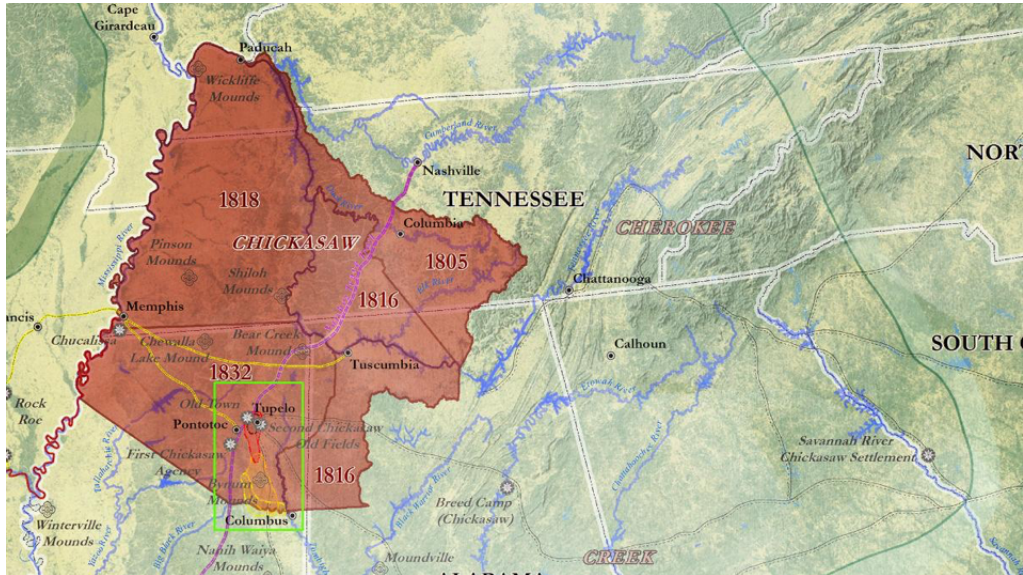
Between the 1830 Indian Removal Act and 1850, the U.S. government employed coercive treaties and Army action to relocate around 100,000 American Indians from east of the Mississippi River to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. The Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole were among the relocated tribes.

Gold was discovered on Cherokee territory in 1830, the same year the Indian Removal Act was passed. No one could stop the influx of Georgians, Carolinians, Virginians, and Alabamians looking for quick riches. The state proclaimed all laws of the Cherokee Nation that were passed after June 1, 1830, null and void, making it impossible for them to claim sovereignty over their own land (National Park Service).

In 1832, The Treaty of Pontotoc Creek was signed. It traded Chickasaw territory East of the Mississippi River for a commitment to discover suitable land in the West (Howell, 1965).

In 1835, the Treaty of New Echota was signed, which gave the Cherokees \$5 million and territory in nowadays Oklahoma in exchange for 7 million acres of their land (Vipperman).

In 1837 and 1838, Cherokee and Chickasaw people were forcibly removed from their homes, confined and in captivity, forced to travel more than a thousand miles on foot, and relocated to Indian Territory, which is today Oklahoma. Over 4,000 people died, and many are buried in unmarked graves along "The Trail of Tears." (T.C.N.D.C.H).



A representation of the land seized in the Great Chickasaw Cession of 1818. (The Chickasaw Nation, n.d.)

UNC's Involvement in Indigenous Land Theft



Figure 2: Map of Removal Routes of Five Civilized Tribes

The Chickasaw Nation Department of Culture and Humanities

Founded in 1789, UNC received little funding from the state

government upon its inception and relied on the sale of stolen native land to stay financially afloat. However, despite a lack of direct funding from the state, UNC was granted the rights to any escheats (land or property from deceased property owners without an heir) in the state of North Carolina. Despite this clause, for the first 29 years of its existence, UNC operated at a loss and struggled financially due to "the Cherokees' and Chickasaws' forceful assertions of territorial sovereignty" (Kelley and Wright, 2020), before the Great Chickasaw Cession Treaty was signed in 1818. Starting that year and continuing throughout the mid 1800's, UNC benefitted from the passage of several federal acts and treaties that enabled them to legally steal over 200,000 acres of land that was inhabited by several indigenous groups, including the Cherokee or the Chickasaw nations.

The Great Chickasaw Cession Treaty was signed in 1818, and formalized the seizure of all Chickasaw territory that remained in Tennessee. One of the key players in said treaty was Trustee Archibald Murphey of UNC, who stated that "the University will be made rich by [the treaty]" (Kelley and Wright, 2020). Beginning with the signing of this treaty, UNC's sales of this land from 1818-1840 comprised on average 34.6% of the University's annual budget. Following the passage of the Indian Removal Act, signed by Andrew Jackson in 1830, almost half of UNC's budget was funded by selling land stolen from the Chickasaw nation. Additionally, between 1834-1835 alone, 94% of the University budget came from the sale of stolen land. The dollar amount of the land sales of that year equaled over \$100,000, which adjusted for inflation is over \$3 million in total. These two acts, Great Chickasaw Cession Treaty of 1818 and the Indian Removal Act of 1830, are just two examples of many federal and state policies that enabled UNC to steal Native land, using land sale profits to make up large percentages of the university's budget. Without the

legalization of land theft, made possible by state and federal acts, and UNC's profiting from the sale of stolen Native land, the university would have been unable to survive their early years and would not be able to exist as an institution today (Kelley and Wright, 2020).

The Environmental Impacts of the Land Theft and Displacement of Indigenous Communities

The removal of Indigenous communities from land spurs issues that connect to many different facets of life. Specifically, environmental impacts are important to understand as they coincide with the removal of Indigenous communities. These changes connect with the idea of environmental colonialism – how “colonial practices have impacted the natural environments of Indigenous peoples” (Duquette, 2020). In this case, those taking the land from Indigenous communities in western Tennessee with the treaty act as the ones participating in the colonial practices, as they are perpetuating the idea of policy used to gain control over Indigenous groups of people.

The signing of the treaty and the removal of the Chickasaw community from the land in Tennessee is detrimental to the environment as construction of industrial buildings and urbanization practices disrupted and destroyed what was previously present on the land. The situated knowledge that Indigenous communities had in relation to the land was gone as well – the ecosystems that had been home to these communities were understood on a deep level as Indigenous communities have a strong understanding and connection of the land in which they inhabit. When overtaken by people who lack this relation to

that environment, problems may arise as preserving new environments can be difficult without understanding the foundational ecological processes and behavior of the land that indigenous communities have been able to understand for many years. Some changes that result from urbanizing land previously owned by indigenous groups can be summarized by asserting that “together, colonialism and capitalism then laid key parts of the groundwork for industrialization and militarization—or carbon-intensive economics—which produce the drivers of anthropogenic climate change, from massive deforestation for commodity agriculture to pet-rochemical technologies that burn fossil fuels for energy” (Whyte, 2017, p. 154). In a general sense, the removal of the tribes in western Tennessee can leave the land more susceptible to climate change and negative environmental processes that coexist.

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