

Like a white wave, western migration moved across the land in the early 1800s — and generally stopped abruptly at the western edge of Arkansas and Missouri. Into that Indian land that came to be known as the territories, President Jackson determined to move Indians, massively and forcefully, from the eastern United States.

The first quarter of the 19th Century brought scattered repopulation of the area, with trading posts, military forts, and missions springing up west of the Arkansas and Missouri lines.

Trade flourished along the Arkansas River as far upstream as the historic Three Forks area — the confluence of the Grand and Verdigris Rivers with the Arkansas near Fort Gibson and Muskogee. It was also considered the upstream limit of easy river traffic up the Arkansas.

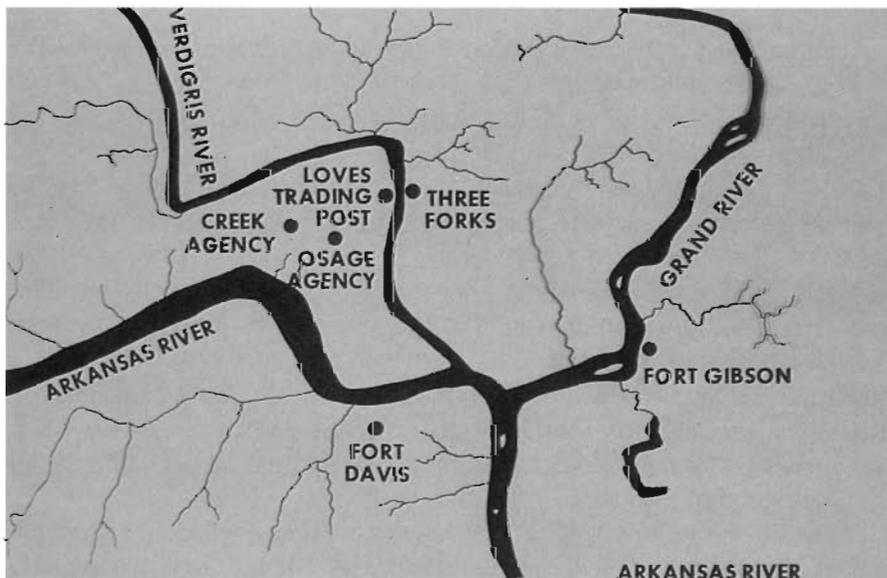
By 1844, the government reported that 60,000 Indians lived in the territory, nearly all eastern Indians who had been transported there. (By comparison, the 1980 census reported that about 100,000 Indians lived in present-day Oklahoma.)

The Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole) were among many who transported the Southern planters' way of life to Indian Territory. The five tribes had their own systems of government. An agricultural economy evolved, supplemented by forest products, and trade developed between the tribes and outsiders.

"In those days," recalled Creek Chief Pleasant Porter, "... we had little farms, and we raised patches of corn and potatoes, and poultry and pigs, horses and cattle, and a little of everything . . . They were all prosperous and happy and contented in their way, and what more could they want?"¹⁰

Government treatment of the tribes worsened after the Civil War, when the five tribes were punished for their alliance with the Confederacy. Indians were forced to turn over half their land holdings to the government for settlement by whites and other Indians being removed from Kansas, Nebraska, and elsewhere.¹¹

With the end of slave ownership, however, Indian families brought in whites to farm as sharecroppers, and laborers were admitted to Indian Territory to work coal mines opened by the Choctaw Nation. By the late 1800s, the region was well on its way to diversity.



The historic "Three Forks" area, rich bottomland at the juncture of the Arkansas, Verdigris, and Grand Rivers, lured earliest man and settlers to the region.