

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOUTHEASTERN INDIGENOUS AMERICANS DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

“With this spirit, future pages shall embrace not only the part I took, but particularly the heroic deeds of comrades with whom I claim the honor of having shared the four years’ perils of a soldier’s life.”– S. G. Spann.¹

The Choctaws of Mississippi, the Seminoles of Florida, and Cherokees of North Carolina participated and became heavily involved with the American Civil War although their story is rarely told. Even though these members of the Five Civilized Tribes had adopted many aspects of Euroamerican culture, they still retained their distinct native heritage. Being Indigenous to the Americas, the Indians² possessed a unique set of knowledge of their surrounding ancient homeland environment which proved to be useful for the Confederacy during battles and conscription efforts. The Confederacy recognized their potential early in the war, so they enticed them with offers which encouraged them to enroll and then serve. But why would these southeastern Indigenous Americans be interested in participating in a conflict that many Indians considered to be and should only be a “white man only” conflict?³ Why did these Indigenous Americans, who were mostly forgotten in the American Deep South, get involved in a war in which they had no interest?

Southeastern Indigenous Americans’ involvement mainly resulted from allegiance, conscription, incentives, negligence, and prestige. Some of the Indians may have felt allegiance or loyalty to individuals, to organizations, or the state that they resided within. Other Indians, such as the Mississippi Choctaws, were conscripted or drafted into Confederate army. The Indians also may have been enticed by material gain or financial incentives. For example, Mississippi Choctaws were offered a bounty of fifty dollars in exchange for their service. And finally, some Indians may have desired to win the prestige of their tribe. In many Indigenous societies, young warriors were encouraged to go to war if they desired to become influential leaders within their tribe.

This paper examines the southeastern Indigenous Americans’ involvement; specifically, the Choctaws of Mississippi, the Seminoles of Florida, and Cherokees of North Carolina; during the Civil War. A thorough focus on these southeastern Indians will offer historiographical value and provide a better understanding of their roles during America’s most trying time.

Historical Significance

The historical significance of southeastern Indigenous Americans’ wartime involvement is because the Confederacy recognized the Indians’ potential and eagerly allied with them in the Western Theater. Their native knowledge was thought crucial for the rebellion’s success, and they

¹ S. G. Spann, “Confederate Choctaws,” *Anderson (SC) Intelligencer*, March 7, 1900, Newspapers.com.

² The terms Indian, American Indian, Native American, and Indigenous American are used interchangeably to describe the people who were discovered in the Americas in 1492.

³ “Lo! The Poor Indian,” *The Daily Picayune* (LA), May 20, 1863, Newspapers.com. This article says, “The [Choctaw Indian] prisoners were utterly indifferent as to the Civil War now in progress. “They were Indians and did not wish to mingle in white men’s conflicts.”

were significant and important enough to be parleyed and enticed with offers. Even though they were in a time of waning influence, Indigenous Americans were still considered a significant force and powerful enough to help ensure the survival of the Confederate States.

Other secondary questions arise when considering the Choctaws of Mississippi, the Seminoles of Florida, and Cherokees of North Carolina in the war. Such as, what was the Indian's history before the Civil War, and how did the Indian's history influence their wartime experience? How did America's Indian civilization policy impact their historical direction? What were the primary reasons that motivated them to engage in the conflict? What were the intentions of the Confederate and Indian leaders? Why were some Indians considered citizens of their respective states? These are key questions that help explain the "why" southeastern Indigenous Americans who got involved in a war that did not really address their concerns, but mostly for the concerns of others, in this case the Confederacy.

Background Material

American Civil War literature regarding the Indians, in general, is rather sparse as compared to the innumerable accounts printed since the war's end. However, despite this short sightedness in scholarship, primary sources do exist which helps complete a better picture of what happened to these Indigenous Americans and answer why did they get involved in the war?

Primary sources that will drive this study include wartime correspondences, newspaper accounts, and firsthand accounts that were written after the war. Many of the primary sources can be found online at websites like ancestry.com, fold3.com and newspapers.com. However, some documents cannot be found on an online resource and must be visited in person onsite.

For the Choctaws in Mississippi, the main historian is Alabamian Samuel G. Spann. He was an eyewitness who actively took part in the war. Spann recruited and commanded one of the Indian battalions from Mississippi. In a greatly detailed newspaper article, Spann wrote,

Private information has reached me that inquiry appeared in a former issue of your paper asking who commanded the 18th battalion of Confederate cavalry and where was it organized? In addition to this several personal friends and Confederate comrades, knowing of the merits of this command and believing that there are feature of special interest that should not be lost to the history of the late civil war, insist that I should respond freely and give to the public some chief points of my war life and the work of the 18th battalion, and also the 1st Battalion of Choctaw Indians, commanded by myself in conjunction with my 18th Battalion of Confederate Cavalry, I therefore send to you an epitome of what I hope will suffice for the present, with the promise of a more elaborate detail later on, in a more substantial form than a mere newspaper communication.⁴

A few years later Spann continued with his narrative in an article found in *Confederate Veteran*. He writes, "Many earnest friends and comrades insist that the Choctaw Indians as Confederate soldier should receive his proper place on the scrolls of events during the War between the States.

⁴ Spann, "Confederate Choctaws."

This task having been so nearly ignored. I send some reminiscences that will be an exponent of the extraordinary merit of the Choctaw Indian on the American Continent.”⁵

When it comes to the Seminoles of Florida, unfortunately, Floridians Andrew E. Hodges and Andrew McBride, both of whom commanded a company of Seminoles, apparently did not write about the Seminoles’ exploits. Thus, the greatest challenge in this work will be gathering information about the roles of the Seminoles of Florida during the war. Nevertheless, there appears to be some availability of documentary evidence. For example, a primary source from a southern newspaper mentions the Seminoles. The 1862 newspaper article from Alabama says,

Several paragraphs having gone the rounds recently that the Seminoles remaining in Florida had recently committed murders and depredations on white families in South Florida, we take pleasure in stating, on the authority of an officer who had just returned from that region, that they are perfectly quite, and have not been guilty of any outrages. They now number about eighty fine warriors, and their chief has called them all into the interior from the coast for fear they will be tampered with by our enemies. They are desirous of entering the Confederate service and will soon be organized into a company and armed. Our old friend, Col. H. V. Snell, who is a great favorite with them, will probably be most effectually and faithfully attended to. When they do find a Yankee intruder, or a Thayer colonist, he will receive his perpetual pre-emption to Florida soil. They are a remnant of a small tribe of brave Seminoles, against the armies of the United States, led by Scott, the best general in the service, during a period of over seven years, and were never completely subjugated. They will prove to be most valuable allies. They will protect a long line of the Florida coast and will be a terror to Yankee invaders. They should henceforth be cherished and protected by the Confederacy, and a home in perpetuity should be laid off for them in South Florida.⁶

The Cherokees of North Carolina appear to be the best documented group out of the three Indigenous American tribes that are the focus of this study. This is in part due to the works of William Holland Thomas, the Cherokees’ commanding officer. Thomas, who was a North Carolinian, befriended the Cherokees many years before the Cherokee Nation headed west along the “Trail of Tears” in the 1830s. He, obviously, refused to migrate west of the Mississippi River and stayed behind in the Great Smoky Mountain homeland of the Cherokees. Thomas left behind a substantial amount of writing that can be found in archives and museums found throughout North Carolina. Evidence of his wartime correspondences can also be found in *The War of the Rebellion* collection. In one particular correspondence from 1861, Thomas is notified that his Cherokee battalion may be mustered into service. The letter shows that “the President decides that the Cherokee battalion may be mustered into the service of the Confederacy and thinks it can be used advantageously for the defense of the coast and swamps of North Carolina.”⁷ Despite all of his

⁵ S. G. Spann, “Choctaw Indians as Confederate Soldiers,” *Confederate Veteran* 13, no. 12 (December 1905): 560.

⁶ “The Florida Indians,” *Montgomery (AL) Weekly Advertiser*, November 5, 1862, Newspapers.com.

⁷ R. H. Chilton, Correspondence to William H. Thomas, Richmond, September 19, 1861, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Volume LI, Part II* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), 304.

writings, Thomas does not appear to have compiled a history of his Cherokees of North Carolina during the struggle.

Tennessean William W. Stringfield was another person who wrote about his experience while commanding the Cherokees, and, during the conflict, he was under the direct leadership of Thomas. In one account, Stringfield recalls, “One Indian company at Baptist Gap had quite a battle with some Federals, killing, wounding and driving back their force. The Indians were led by Lieutenant Astooga Stoga ... who was killed in the charge ... Like most of the Indians of his tribe, he was a professed Christian ... The Indians were furious at his death and before they could be restrained, the scalped several of the Federal wounded and dead, for which ample apology was made at the time.”⁸ From this small sample of writings, there is ample evidence of background material to give a better picture and answer the broader question of why the Indians became involved in the deadliest conflict in American history.

Schools of Thought in Civil War Literature

American Civil War history can be categorized into two general schools of thought: fundamentalist or revisionist. Historians who viewed that the war was inevitable are referred to as fundamentalists. They viewed the clash between the North and the South as inevitable, unavoidable, or irrepressible. These historians, like Henry Wilson and James Ford Rhodes, believed that slavery was the source of the war. Many fundamentalist historians believed that culture, economics, and ideological sectional differences were “irreconcilable.”⁹ Other historians can be placed into a revisionist group. The revisionists, such as Frank L. Owsley and James G. Randall, thought slavery was not central to the conflict but peripheral. Revisionists intensely argued for economic, political, and social reasons for the sectional crisis. Revisionist also believed that inept politicians purposefully avoided an amicable resolution or that “the impending war had been exacerbated and would [later] subside.”¹⁰ Researchers have consistently identified these two dominant themes.¹¹

Outside of the predominant works of the fundamentalists and revisionists can be found the nondominant themed works of historians who concentrate on Indigenous Americans who participated in the struggle. Although not a major school of thought, micro-historical focused works (or microhistories) tend to emphasize an understudied subject within “more extensive scholarship.”¹² One understudied niche is the subject of Indigenous Americans who engaged in the Western Theater of the Civil War.

⁸ W. W. Stringfield, *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-65, Volume III* (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1901), 736, Archive.org.

⁹ Michael Schearer, “Historiography of the Causes of the Civil War” (Liberty University, 2020), 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3714025>.

¹⁰ Brandon M. Eldridge, “The Ever-Evolving Historiography of the American Civil War,” *Graduate Review* 1, no. 1 (2021): 56.

¹¹ Kenneth S. Greenberg, “Civil War Revisionism,” *Reviews in American History* 7, no. 2 (June 1979): 202. Greenberg says, “The conflict between fundamentalist and revisionist students of Civil War causation—between those who see slavery as central to sectional conflict and those who see it as peripheral—has a long and acrimonious history.”

¹² Eldridge, 59.

Historiography

A “literary chasm” exists in regard to southeastern Indigenous Americans’ involvement in the American Civil War. Although well-known writers like Annie H. Abel have contributed multi-volume works for Indian Nations found in the Trans-Mississippi Theater, a dearth of scholarship causes a void in literary academia for those who participated in the Eastern Theater. Major works in this genre do not exist for the Choctaws in Mississippi and Seminoles in Florida, and the smaller references that do exist are rather vague. The Indigenous Americans’ place within the “major developments of American history”¹³ is often ignored. In fact, Indian history, in general, is considered “antiquarian” and “segregated” from the rest of American history.¹⁴ Even though these barriers exist, scholarship, outside of the predominant works of the fundamentalists and revisionists, can be found in nondominant themed works of historians who studied, whether substantially or cursory, the southeastern Indigenous Americans who were involved in the war.

The initial first-generational historian is Alfred J. Brown (1834-1907). He was born in central Mississippi where he lived all his life and was in the mercantile business. Brown participated in the war and, much later, became a member of the State Historical Association.¹⁵ Brown published a book called the *History of Newton County, Mississippi, from 1834-1894* (1894). In Brown’s book, an enormously scholarly gap exists. The wartime role and events surrounding the Choctaws of Mississippi are not adequately addressed. He wrote about the Choctaws of Mississippi in this fashion,

This battalion of Choctaw Indians, was made up from the surrounding counties of Neshoba, Jasper, Scott, and probably some others having Indians in them, Newton furnishing her quota, about one-third, or one company. This battalion had three companies of about sixty men each; contained one hundred and eighty men. They were camped at Newton and drilled for service. J. W. [Pierce] was major of the battalion, B. F. Duckworth was captain of the Newton Company, C. H. Doolittle was first lieutenant, Wm. Robinson, second lieutenant. This battalion was sent to Camp Moore, near [Tangipahoa], LA, where they were being instructed. They were in close proximity with the enemy, and they were suddenly surrounded and taken prisoners before they had ever seen any service. Most of the officers, who were white men, escaped. They were taken to New Orleans and Mr. Wm. Robinson, who was in command of the Newton company, captured with the Indians, says the men were separated from the officers, and nothing is known of what became of the Indians. Some suppose they were sent to the Choctaw Nation and have never returned.¹⁶

Samuel G. Spann (1833-1907), who is our second first-generational historian, was a commanding Confederate officer for the Choctaws of Mississippi. For brevity, he usually penned

¹³ David A. Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians: Civil War Policy and Politics* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1978), 1. This book is not part of the historiography but is listed in the bibliography.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Harvest of the Grim Reaper in Newton,” *The Newton (MS) Record*, December 12, 1907. This article is not part of the historiography.

¹⁶ A. J. Brown, *History of Newton County, Mississippi, from 1834-1894* (Jackson, MS: Clarion-Ledger, 1894), 96-97, Archive.org.

his name as S. G. Spann. Spann was born in South Carolina in 1833 and moved to Mississippi as a boy. He became acquainted with the Choctaws in Mississippi who resisted removal efforts and learned their language and customs. Spann attended the University of Virginia in Charlottesville where he studied to become a lawyer. He eventually became a planter in Dallas County, Alabama where he eventually sided with the Confederacy. He authored extensively, writing numerous newspaper articles and at least one book. Spann wrote a newspaper article entitled “Confederate Choctaws”¹⁷ (1900). A few years later, he wrote the 1905 *Confederate Veteran* article “Choctaw Indians as Confederate Soldiers.”¹⁸ In an untitled and undated published manuscript, Spann collected a number of sworn statements from veterans describing their service with him during the war.¹⁹ In these particular sources, Spann clearly shows the roles of the Choctaws of Mississippi during the conflict.

William W. Stringfield (1837-1923) is the third first-generational historian. He was a commissioned officer, under William H. Thomas, who commanded the Cherokees of North Carolina in Thomas’ Legion of Indians and Highlanders, later called the 69th Infantry Regiment. At the turn of the 20th century, Stringfield wrote a detailed chapter, “Sixty-ninth Regiment,” that is found in *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-65, Volume III*²⁰ (1901). The 69th Regiment’s role is explained, touching on topics like campaigns, conscription efforts, and “Indians in Battles.”²¹ However, most of Stringfield’s information pertains to white troops.

The last of our first-generational historians is John Blakeley (1844-1910) and was a Mississippi veteran of the war. Blakeley served as a non-commissioned officer in Spann’s Independent Scouts, and, at the turn of the 20th century, he served as an adjutant for Spann’s United Confederate Veterans camp. When Blakeley was adjutant for his camp in the early part of 1903, he sent a couple of letters to a newspaper concerning the Choctaws of Mississippi he served with during the conflict. The first one is entitled “Choctaw Indians as Confederate Soldiers”²² (1903) and the other is “Interesting Roster”²³ (1903). The information that Blakeley presents echoes that of Spann’s writings.

The next historian was a generational shift from the eyewitness writers. Annie H. Abel (1873-1947) is a well-known expert on Indigenous American history. She earned a doctorate from Yale University and came to prominence during the Progressive Era. She is perhaps best known for a three-volume series entitled *The Slaveholding Indians*. These historical works concern Indigenous Americans who exclusively participated in the Trans-Mississippi Theater. Volume I is entitled *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist: An Omitted Chapter in the Diplomatic History of the Southern Confederacy* (1915). Volume II is entitled *The American Indian as Participant in*

¹⁷ Spann, “Confederate Choctaws.”

¹⁸ Spann, “Choctaw Indians as Confederate Soldiers,” 560-561.

¹⁹ [Spann, S. G.?], 18th Battalion Confederate Cavalry, 1863, (also known as Spann’s Battalion of Independent Scouts), Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Series 390, Record Group 9, n.d., 3-15. The veterans’ sworn statements are dated between 1900-1902.

²⁰ Stringfield, 729-761.

²¹ Ibid., 736.

²² John Blakeley, “Choctaw Indians as Confederate Soldiers,” *The Meridian* (MS) Press, March 29, 1903, Newspapers.com.

²³ John Blakeley, “Interesting Roster,” *The Meridian* (MS) Press, March 22, 1903, Newspapers.com.

the Civil War (1919) And finally, Volume III is entitled *The American Indian Under Reconstruction* (1925).

Abel was aware of the Choctaws of Mississippi and the Cherokees of North Carolina because she briefly mentions them in a footnote which is the only information presented in her works. In her journal article, "The Indians in the Civil War"²⁴ (1910), she wrote of the Cherokees of North Carolina and the Choctaws of Mississippi in a footnote by stating, "The Choctaws of Mississippi and the North Carolina Cherokees were certainly not under [the Trans-Mississippi command of Albert Pike.]"²⁵

The next author was a sociologist who earned a Ph.D. at Duke University in 1937. Vale Leonard Broom (1911-2009) also went by Leonard Bloom. He received a Fulbright Fellowship in 1950 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1958. Broom's other works includes *Cherokee Dance and Drama* (1951), *Transformation of the Negro American* (1965), and *Opportunity and Attainment in Australia* (1976). His article, "The Acculturation of the Eastern Cherokee: Historical Aspects" (1942), was published during World War II. Broom explains extraordinarily little of the wartime role and events of the Cherokees of North Carolina. Broom writes,

In the Civil War nearly 400 of the Eastern Cherokee enlisted in the Confederate armed forces, with which Thomas was in sympathy. Because of Thomas' plan they were used as scouts and home guards in the mountain region. [James] Mooney, [an ethnographer who lived several years among the Cherokees and] who had an opportunity to confer with a number of officers and survivors, noted one instance of scalping, and the recrudescence of the Aboriginal war complex ... The Cherokee had no loyalty to the Confederate cause as such but were induced to join through propaganda contrary to the original wishes of Thomas. No doubt their main loyalty was to their friend and leader.²⁶

A significant gap in literature appears after Broom. It was not until well after the Civil Rights era when renewed interest of Indigenous Americans in the Civil War began to appear. These authors could be classified as post-Civil Rights era historians. They are not as concerned about the cause of the sectional crisis as other historians are, but, rather, they tend to emphasize on a particular race, Indigenous Americans in this case.

Long after Broom's 1942 work was published, a transition occurred from a cursory glance to a more thorough examination of the Cherokees' wartime involvement. John R. Finger (born 1939) graduated from the University of Washington with a Ph.D. He taught at the University of Tennessee for more than thirty years. His works include *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (1991) and *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (2003). Finger wrote *The Eastern Band of Cherokee, 1819-1900*²⁷ (1984). The purpose of Finger's book

²⁴ Annie H. Abel, "The Indians in the Civil War," *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (January 1910), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1838335>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

²⁶ Leonard Bloom, "The Acculturation of the Eastern Cherokee: Historical Aspects," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 19, no. 4 (October 1942): 356, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23514999>.

²⁷ John R. Finger, "The Civil War," In *The Eastern Band of Cherokee, 1819-1900*, 83-100 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), Archive.org.

is to expand the literature of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and to “demonstrate the variety of sources available” for research.²⁸ He details the Cherokees of North Carolina’s struggle during the conflict in Chapter 5 “The Civil War.” Finger, as an example of what is found in the book, says that Thomas’ “Legion was part of the Confederate Army’s Department of East Tennessee, headquartered at Knoxville, and through most of 1863 was stationed at Strawberry Plains or Zollicoffer, in upper East Tennessee.”²⁹ At one point in his discussion, Finger refutes what William H. Thomas, the commander of the Cherokees, claims. Thomas claimed he never intended to have them involved in the war. But, as Finger shows, “The fact is that Thomas campaigned for creation of a Cherokee battalion very early in the war, long before passage of the conscription law.”³⁰

Two authors cowrote the next publication. E. Stanly Godbold, Jr. (born 1942) earned a bachelor’s and a Ph.D. at Duke University. He worked as a historian at several universities. He is best known for *Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter: The Georgia Years, 1924-1974* (2010) and *Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter: Power and Human Rights, 1975-2020* (2022). Mattie U. Russell (1915-1988) also earned a doctoral degree from Duke University.³¹ She was an archivist and retired as the curator of manuscripts in the William R. Perkins Library at Duke University. Her doctoral thesis is entitled “William Holland Thomas: White Chief of the North Carolina Cherokee” (1959). Goldbold and Russell co-authored *Confederate Colonel and Cherokee Chief: The Life of William Holland Thomas*³² (1990). Their book is more of a biography of William H. Thomas. Only chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to the Civil War but are well-written with numerous footnotes.

In 1991, Robert A. Taylor (born 1958) earned his Ph.D. in history from Florida State University. He is a dean at the Florida Institute of Technology. Taylor was one of the editors of *This War So Horrible: The Civil War Diary of Hiram Smith Williams* (1993) and for *The Governors of Florida* (2022). Taylor’s journal article, “Unforgotten Threat: Florida Seminoles in the Civil War”³³ (1991), is the best source, thus far, of information pertaining to the Seminoles of Florida. He shows that Florida was aware of what little was left of the Seminoles at the beginning of the Civil War. According to Taylor, Florida’s Governor John Milton had put the “Indians ahead of the dreaded abolitionist as potential threats. Milton and his fellow citizens believed that those natives still at large in the interior posed a frighteningly real danger.”³⁴

James W. Covington (1917-2004) earned a Ph.D. at the University of Oklahoma. He published *The Billy Bowlegs War, 1855-1858: The Final Stand of the Seminoles Against the Whites* (1982) among other works. Covington authored the book *The Seminoles of Florida* (1993). Covington’s book does not mention the Seminoles as actively involved in the Civil War; however, Covington

²⁸ Finger, xi.

²⁹ Ibid., 87.

³⁰ Ibid., 98.

³¹ “Dr. Mattie Russell, Duke Curator,” *Durham Morning Herald* (NC), May 6, 1988, Newspapers.com. This article is not part of the historiography.

³² E. Stanly Godbold, Jr. and Mattie U. Russell, *Confederate Colonel and Cherokee Chief: The Life of William Holland Thomas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

³³ Robert A. Taylor, “Unforgotten Threat: Florida Seminoles in the Civil War,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (January 1991): 300-314, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30147523>.

³⁴ Ibid., 301.

shows that the stage is set for them to participate by saying “there were only 150 warriors in the whole vast peninsula”³⁵ near the end of the Third Seminole War (1855-1858).

Laurence M. Hauptman (born 1945) received a Ph.D. from New York University sometime around 1970. He is a scholar of Indigenous Americans studies, particularly Iroquois history. He published works such as *The Iroquois in the Civil War* (1993) and *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations Since 1800* (2008). Hauptman’s book, *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War*³⁶ (1995), recognizes that Indigenous Americans also “served at Second Bull Run and Antietam in 1862; at Chattanooga in 1863; at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and Second Cabin Creek in 1864; and in the Union assaults on Petersburg in 1864 and 1865.”³⁷ The author is aware that nearly 20,000 Indigenous Americans, in both the Confederacy and Union, served in the Eastern, Western, and Trans-Mississippi Theaters.³⁸

Hauptman poses the critical question “What ... explains the significant presence of American Indians in the Civil War?”³⁹ In brief, he observes nine answers to this question: to escape poverty, dependence on the non-Indian world, wanderlust and adventure, alliances and obligations, status within his Indigenous community, slavery (whether for it or against it), persuaded to join, conscripted, and survival (whether it be for oneself or the Indigenous nation).⁴⁰ The ultimate goal of Hauptman’s book is to “recover a hidden chapter in the history of the Civil War.”⁴¹ The role and events of the Cherokees of North Carolina is substantially described in a chapter devoted to them; however, the Choctaws of Mississippi are scarcely mentioned. The Seminoles of Florida are entirely ignored. In regard to the Choctaws of Mississippi, Hauptman writes,

Although some of the Indians of the South were Unionist, greater numbers served in the Confederate military service. The vast majority of southern Indians were non-conscripted recruits, although some eastern Choctaw in the First Choctaw Battalion, Mississippi Cavalry, were forced against their will to serve the Confederacy until their mass desertion and capture by Union forces during the onset of the Vicksburg Campaign in the spring of 1863.⁴²

The next author is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Clara Sue Kidwell (born 1941) attended the University of Oklahoma where she earned a bachelor’s, master’s, and, finally, a Ph.D. in 1970. She wrote *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (1995). Kidwell only tersely presents information about the Choctaws of Mississippi during the Civil War. In her work, Kidwell’s says,

³⁵ James W. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), 139, Archive.org.

³⁶ Laurence M. Hauptman, *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1995), Archive.org.

³⁷ Ibid., x.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., xi.

⁴⁰ Ibid., xi-xii.

⁴¹ Ibid., xv.

⁴² Hauptman, 87,

In the turmoil of the Civil War, as the Confederacy grew increasingly desperate for manpower, the Choctaws gained the attention of the Confederate army. The Mississippi militia had not chosen to use them, but [S. G. Spann] organized the First Battalion of Choctaw Indians for the Confederacy in February 1863. A number of Choctaw soldiers were captured in a battle near Ponchatoula, Louisiana, and several died in a Union prison hospital in New York. In an act of heroism in Mississippi, Choctaw rescued twenty-three survivors and retrieved ninety bodies when a Confederate troop train plunged off a bridge and fell into the Chunky River. After this brief moment of glory in the history of the state, the Choctaws again faded from view.⁴³

Jacqueline A. Matte (1935-2024) earned a bachelor's from Samford University in 1971. She later received two master's degrees, one in history and the other in education, from the University of Alabama. She authored *They Say the Wind is Red: The Alabama Choctaw, Lost in Their Own Land* (2002). Just as Kidwell, Matte presents little information about the Choctaws in the Eastern Theater during the war. Matte writes,

Beginning in 1862, the Confederate States of America recruited Choctaw men into service. A recruiting camp was established in Mobile at the foot of Stone Street adjoining the grounds occupied by Spann's Battalion of White Mounted Cavalry. S. G. Spann advertised in the *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, from May 9 to July 10, [1863] ... Spann's Battalion of Mounted Scouts was formed by authority of the Secretary of War under the immediate auspices of General Dabney H. Maury, Commander of the Department of the Gulf. The Mobile Camp filled up rapidly under the personal charge of Lieutenant Robert Welch, of Marion Alabama, and Captain R. (Russell W.) Lewis, of ... Mississippi. One recruit, Eahantatubbee, also known as Jack Amos, acted as interpreter for Major Spann and kept him informed about problems that arose with the Choctaw ... Other than these fragments of information, little has been found on the Choctaw recruitment camp in Mobile.⁴⁴

The last author, Paul A. Thomsen (born 1973), appears to be a generational shift from the post-Civil Rights writers and could be classified as a 21st-century historian. Thomsen is a freelance writer who was a graduate instructor and doctoral student at Kansas State University. His specialty is military history among other topics. He is published in the *Journal of Military Intelligence* and *Military History* and based in New York City. Thomsen wrote *Rebel Chief: The Motley Life of Colonel William Holland Thomas* (2004). Just as with Godbold and Russell, Thomsen's book is more of a biography of William Holland Thomas rather than a focus on the Cherokees during the war. Thomsen appears to be academically competent because he uses ample endnotes and has a thorough bibliography.

⁴³ Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 170, Archive.org.

⁴⁴ Jacqueline Anderson Matte, *They Say the Wind is Red: The Alabama Choctaw, Lost in Their Own Land*, (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2002), 65-67.

Conclusion

The Indigenous Americans' involvement was intricately linked to the actions of their white commanders. The Confederates officers selected to command were acquainted with the Indians and their settlements who were under the officers' purview.^{45,46} Many also had a working knowledge of the Indians' language and were likely familiar with their cultural practices. To help us better comprehend, specific questions are needed to understand why the Indians and their white officers got involved with the war, so several common questions will be delved into for the forthcoming chapters on each Indigenous American tribe. Such as, who were the commanders of each respective tribe? How were the Indians recruited? What were their units called? What wartime actions were they involved with? And, ultimately, why did they become involved?

Chapter two will deal with how the Choctaws of Mississippi became involved with the Confederacy. A short look into the Choctaws' history and how America's civilization policy steered them to a course of wartime action which led them to fight alongside their white brethren will be acknowledged. Individuals who led the Indians will need to be recognized. Three white southern gentlemen, who all became Confederate officers, were heavily involved in getting the Indians to enroll. John G. Harrison, John W. Pierce, and Samuel G. Spann were all personally acquainted with the Choctaws of Mississippi. John G. Harrison, who was a Mississippian, had mustered a small volunteer company in 1862. Around the same time that Harrison's company appeared, a John W. Pierce, who was also a Mississippian, had the same intentions. However, Pierce had successfully raised a two-company battalion with the plan of raising more companies. Pierce's company was called the 1st Choctaw Battalion and was headquartered at Newton Station, Mississippi. Samuel G. Spann was a planter from near Selma, Alabama. Spann, ever since boyhood, intimately knew of the Choctaws of Mississippi. He eventually raised his own Indigenous American battalion for use in the latter half of the war. Some of the Choctaws' actions to be studied include a rescue and recovery of victims in a devastating train accident,⁴⁷ their participation during the Battle of Ponchatoula of March 1863,⁴⁸ and the possibility of them tracking those who evaded Confederate service in Mississippi.⁴⁹ The question as to why the Choctaws of Mississippi joined the Confederacy will, naturally, be thoroughly examined.

Chapter three will concern itself with the Seminoles of Florida and will start by looking into the Third Seminole War (1855-1858) which established a foundation for their participation a few years later in the Civil War. Andrew E. Hodges and Andrew McBride, who were both white Floridians, were the commanding officers for the Seminoles in Florida. Hodges was one of two captains of

⁴⁵ "A Timely Move and a Good One," *Eastern Clarion* (MS), August 8, 1862, Newspapers.com. The paper shows, "Capt. [S. G. Spann] has held council with the prominent heads of the different settlements, accompanied by prominent white citizens who are versant with the habits and language of the Choctaws."

⁴⁶ Stringfield, 729. Stringfield says, "[William Holland Thomas] was ... raised to manhood close by the Cherokee Indians" and "was made chief" of the Cherokees of North Carolina.

⁴⁷ "Another Fearful Railroad Accident," *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, February 20, 1863, Newspapers.com.

⁴⁸ "Ponchatoula," *Mobile (AL) Advertiser and Register*, March 29, 1863, Newspapers.com.

⁴⁹ Carl McIntire, "Choctaw Rebels Tracked Down Deserters during Civil War," *The Clarion-Ledger Jackson (MS) Daily News*, July 20, 1980, Newspapers.com. McIntire writes, "At first the [Choctaw Indians'] unit was kept in the Newton area to track down deserters—both white and black—who appear to have been numerous from what records are available. Jones County, where "The Free State of Jones" was not part of either the Union or the Confederacy, was a favorite refuge of the deserters, and it was in that area that most of the tracking was done."

the Seminoles. He was instrumental in getting the Indians to join the ranks of the Confederacy, and the Indians became involved with a company due largely to Hodges' efforts. Early in the war, Hodges was in a "Coast Guards" company from May 1861 to August 1861.⁵⁰ In 1862, he raised two distinct companies. The first was a "Home Guard" company that watched river entries along the west coast which led into the interior of Florida. The second was an Indians' unit which was called Hodges' company. While some Seminoles of Florida were under the command of Hodges, Indians were reported to have been at the Battle of Olustee in February 1864. Hodges' company apparently passed into the hands of an Andrew McBride. Before leading the Seminoles, McBride enrolled as a private with the 9th Florida Infantry Regiment.⁵¹ This new captain led the Seminole company from July 1864 to war's end. A muster roll with sixty-five names was created, and the company was renamed to McBride's company. At one point, McBride notified Secretary of War James A. Seddon that McBride had raised a company of Seminole Indians. As before with the Choctaws of Mississippi, the question of why the Indians joined the fight will be scrutinized.

Chapter four will examine the Cherokees of North Carolina and how William Holland Thomas, their commanding officer, got them involved in the struggle. Thomas was instrumental in organizing the Indians for service with the Confederacy. The Cherokees of North Carolina appear to have organized early in the war as a home guard but was apparently reconsidered for broader operations. In 1861, a letter shows that Jefferson Davis had decided "that the Cherokee battalion may be mustered into the service" and that they were to be used along the "coast and swamps of North Carolina."⁵² They were in several skirmishes in and around their ancient homeland found in the Great Smoky Mountains. As an example, in December 1863, Thomas says that his "Indian companies were ordered by Maj. Gen. Buckner to fall back on the Smoky Mountains, to aid in protecting North Carolina."⁵³ He continues, "The Indians have done good service, but little is known. It becomes my duty to mention some of the important services they with a few whites have rendered."⁵⁴ He says, in short, that the Cherokees of North Carolina had become involved in a skirmish with "one hundred and ten Yankees, and a large number of Home Guards."⁵⁵ They were also apparently used to track down potential conscripts as well. Just as with the Choctaws and Seminoles, the reason as to why they joined the Confederacy, why they became involved in a war that was primarily between whites, will be carefully explored and meticulously examined.

In summation, the Choctaws of Mississippi, the Seminoles of Florida, and the Cherokees of North Carolina all had various reasons to become involved in the American Civil War. Some had joined the war because they were forced to do so, as with the Choctaws. Conscription had forced their hand. Others, like the Seminoles out of Florida, had unknown reasons, but they likely did it out of loyalty, for allegiance with their neighbors and acquaintances in which the Indians took years to establish trust amongst each other. The Seminoles probably did it for incentives as well, as in trading for goods they needed for survival. Finally, the Cherokees of North Carolina, just as with the Seminoles, did it out of loyalty to their long-time leader and friend, William Holland Thomas. Other Indians, from all three tribal groups, may have done it for incentives. They would

⁵⁰ *Soldiers of Florida in the Seminole Indian, Civil and Spanish-American Wars*, Compiled by Fred L. Robertson (Live Oak, FL: Democrat Book and Job Print, 1903), 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵² R. H. Chilton, *The War of the Rebellion*, 304.

⁵³ "Thomas' Legion," *The Western Democrat* (NC), January 26, 1864, Newspapers.com.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

have done it for financial gain as offered in the form of bounties; in a sense, they were mercenaries. Others, definitely in the minority, may have felt neglected and wanted to establish fresh relations with the newly founded government of the Confederacy. A small few may have wanted the prestige, or maybe for adventurism, of taking part in war where other tribal members dared not to follow.

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