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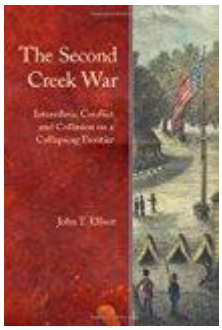
John T. Ellisor. *The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 512 pp. $50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-2548-0.



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Capitalism, Removal, and the Second Creek War

In *The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier*, John T. Ellisor investigates the Second Creek War. It broke out in the "Old" Creek Nation (New Alabama) in the spring of 1836 but soon blazed across three Southern states. The war prolonged Creek removal, paved the way for the expansion of the cotton belt, and generated violence into the 1850s. Above all, Ellisor argues that this was a war of "surprisingly long duration" (p. 5). Like the Upper Creeks who waged the "First" Creek War of 1813-14, the Lower Creeks who ignited the "Second" Creek War sought to prevent the "cultural disintegration" of the Creek world by resisting incorporation into the nineteenth-century global capitalist marketplace (p. 172). An understudied event in the Southern historiography and ethnohistorical literature, the Second Creek War affected the development of Southern antebellum culture by giving it, as Ellisor contends, a "Native cast" (p. 431).

Ellisor couches his archival work in a rewarding theoretical framework that draws from social history, world-systems theory, postcolonial studies, and the sociology of resistance.[1] He examines state newspapers, soldiers' journals, county histories, and the *American State Papers* for the correspondence of federal and state authorities. Most of the records were authored by elite white men, who infantilized the Creek and Seminole Indians with whom they engaged and vilified lower-class whites as inferior rogues. Like any careful social historian, Ellisor interrogates the sources for snapshots into the nameless and faceless lives of ordinary Indians, whites, and slaves whose actions and thoughts can be reasonably ascertained. This monograph pivots on four key debates and suggests future directions in Southern ethnohistory and, more generally, the mainstream of Southern historiography.

First, Ellisor argues that capitalism powerfully shaped Creek Removal. In March 1832, Upper and

Lower Creek leaders brokered the Cusseta Treaty with the Department of War. In it, Creeks ceded 5.2 million acres of all remaining Creek land in Alabama, and in exchange the United States pledged to allot some 2,187,000 acres to the male heads of Creek households. The remainder would then be sold to whites, with the federal government promising to protect Creek tribal boundaries. One key provision quickly became controversial: Creeks were allowed to sell the allotments to whites and move west *or*, by 1837, obtain deeds to their property, remain in Alabama with clan members, and become free citizens of the United States. While government authorities expected Creeks to remove westward to Indian Territory, most Creeks prepared to survey their lands and reside in the Old Creek Nation.

Yet the treaty unleashed a nasty "resource competition" that gave rise to an exploitative "Indian business" that undermined Creek sovereignty (pp. 49, 131). While poor whites squatted on treaty land, wealthy speculators, who operated out of Columbus, Georgia, fraudulently acquired treaty land. Through the process of "personation," speculators paid individual Creek men, who were poor and desperate, to purchase a tract of treaty land by illegally impersonating the legitimate claimant (p. 103). The impersonator then sold the illicit deed to the speculator at below-market rate. As a result, speculators secured title to thousands of acres of the Creek Nation. Aside from egregious land fraud, the hundreds of grog shops that sprouted up across the Creek Nation devastated the poor, demoralized, and hungry. Intoxication drove theft and violence upward and accounted for a substantial portion of the Nation's debts, which were partially reckoned through the garnishment of tribal annuities. In the wake of the Cusseta Treaty, Creeks formed a "permanent underclass of thieves, beggars, and debt-bound peons working the land they lost to the whites" (p. 136). Above all, the treaty commodified the land, resources, and people of the Creek Nation.

Second, the Indian business took shape in the 1830s, when, as Ellisor claims, whites, blacks, and Indians lived in unprecedented proximity. A pluralistic South, in turn, produced an unpredictable array of "conflict and collusion" across New Alabama (p. 49). Drawing on Southern newspapers, he contends that the Lower Creek uprising was a "civil rebellion" that erupted between neighbors and close acquaintances and *not* strangers (p. 281). He argues that "respectable settlers" jockeyed with "white roughs," some of whom intermarried or formed temporary political alliances with "angry Creeks" (p. 144). Together, poor whites and Indians challenged the economic supremacy of state officials, land speculators, and militia officers both before and during the war. Rebel Creeks who dodged two rounds of removal in 1836 and 1837 had sexual relations with poor whites or slaves, producing métis offspring. Even into the 1870s, as local histories attest, Creeks were living in Alabama among white and black people.

Facing new pressures from the Indian business and interethnic conflict, the Creek Nation splintered along class lines. Tapping Steven Hahn's ***Invention of the Creek Nation*** (2004), which argues that town-based factions had forced concessions from Europeans in the eighteenth-century Creek Confederacy, Ellisor demonstrates that Creek factionalism had become a liability by the 1830s. Although Michael Green noted in ***Politics of Indian Removal*** (1982) that removal generated bitter conflict within the Nation, Ellisor reframes removal in the larger context of the U.S. market revolution and the spread of empire across the nineteenth-century globe. In the 1830s, the traditional factions among Creeks had become "economically determined" (p. 36). While Tuckabatchee's Opothle Yahola cooperated with whites, others, like the militant Lower Creeks, rejected European American civilization. Lower Creeks, too, were divided. Benjamin Marshall and Paddy Carr, wealthy métis slaveholders, allied with white elites, while the lower-class rebels re-

jected privatism for communalism, clan strength, and local autonomy.

Third, most historians assume that the war was short-lived, and that federal soldiers and state militia had concluded the war by the fall of 1836. However, a kaleidoscope of interethnic alliances and intraethnic divisions developed outside of New Alabama as the Second Creek War spread to southern Georgia and the Florida panhandle, where the Lower Creek rebels fled to their Seminole kinspeople in the mid-to-late 1830s. By examining the voluminous military correspondence, Ellisor argues that the Second Creek War took shape in the "unobserved interspace" between Alabama Removal and the Second Seminole War (p. 264). Challenging John K. Mahon's work on the Seminoles, Ellisor urges scholars to view the Second Creek War and Second Seminole War as the same region-wide military conflict.

He also reveals that the rebels, composed of non-Muskogean Hitchitis and Yuchis, operated in decentralized, autonomous bands that forced U.S. and state military units into unconventional warfare, such as brutal swamp fighting and search-and-destroy missions. Further, militiamen often defied the authority of their captains as well as U.S. General Thomas Jesup, giving the rebels time to rest and recoup. White society was not the "confident monolith marching ever westward to fulfill the nation's manifest destiny," as the rebels learned in summer 1836 (p. 222). Military conflict was seemingly never-ending. In the Florida panhandle, poor Lower Creeks and Seminoles battled poor whites into the 1850s in a "backwoods war" whose casualties are unknown (p. 411).

Last, Ellisor charts the impact of Creek removal on ordinary whites, a theme that historians have overlooked. He believes it is shocking that whites did not romanticize the Second Creek War or removal. White Alabamians and Georgians were not as "remorseless" and vindictive as one might expect, especially since only six rebel men were actually sentenced to death in the Chattahoochee River valley (p. 298). Whites viewed Creek removal as "an unfortunate yet somehow unavoidable episode in the ongoing struggle between 'savagery' and 'civilization.' They even wrote it all off," Ellisor shows from county histories, "as the unfathomable will of their God" (p. 298).

The local histories, newspapers, and political correspondence, however, occasionally work at cross-purposes. For instance, he later contends that whites' "racial ideology" eventually triumphed, for speculators, federal officials, and New Alabama settlers had achieved their ultimate goal by the late 1830s: "Indian land and Indian removal" (pp. 314-315). Most whites "seemed satisfied with that, disdaining the desire for retribution and wanting only to enjoy the newfound bounty of a rich land finally free of its Native population" (p. 315). To what extent, then, did race and citizenship shape whites' perceptions of both removal and the Indian business? Could poor whites, already facing the downward pressures of a highly stratified slave society, have felt threatened by the possibility that Creek men were able to claim citizenship as a result of the Cusseta Treaty? Although these questions remain partially unanswered, Ellisor has broached more complex discussions of the role of race and class in the antebellum South.

For Ellisor, capitalism is a juggernaut. In Africa, Latin America, or the U.S. South, as he alleges, the capitalist world-system "always resulted in a dispossession of the Native population, exploitation of the labor supply," the development of income inequality, "and, of course, an abundance of violence and bloodshed" (p. 360). This approach has a possible pitfall. Whereas poor Creeks were victims of the grog shops and easily "beguiled" by cunning land speculators, others who colluded with wealthy whites were "traitorous" sellouts (pp. 16, 98). The analytical line between Creek victimization and Creek agency is slightly fuzzy. Perhaps ordinary Creeks believed that steering clear

of the hazards of the Indian business meant hitching their wagons to the South's new elite.

Minor criticism aside, *Second Creek War* throws new light on Creek and Seminole removal and on the development of class in the early-to-mid nineteenth-century South. His central contribution to the Southern historiography is that capitalism and removal mutually shaped the rise of antebellum slave society, which was committed to the dispossession of the region's indigenous people and to the expansion of the cotton market controlled by white elites. Specialists of Southern history, ethnohistory, social history, and the new military history will find this book helpful and innovative.

Note

[1]. Several influential studies shape Ellisor's bottom-up framework on proletarian resistance, European-indigenous diplomacy and conflict, and the global expansion of capitalism, including Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Praeger, 1963); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1976); Claude E. Welch, *Anatomy of Rebellion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980); and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).