Treaty of Greenville, 1795

The Treaty of Greenville marked a turning point in what historian François Furstenberg calls "the long war for the West" (1754 – 1815), a struggle to decide the fate of the trans-Appalachian West, resolving whether the region would become a permanent Indian country, part of the fledgling American republic or an imperial possession of Britain, France, or Spain. From the end of the Revolutionary War through the Treaty of Greenville and beyond, an alliance of Ohio and Great Lakes Indians, intermittently supported by Britain, hurled itself upon the invading Americans in an effort to hold fast to their Indian homelands north of the Ohio River. The alliance inflicted crushing defeats on the armies of the Republic and backcountry militias, but eventually suffered a crushing defeat itself at the Battle of Fallen Timbers and reluctantly agreed to a costly truce. Bowed, but not broken, the leaders of the alliance acceded to the terms of the Treaty of Greenville, ceding most of present-day Ohio and large parts of Indiana, thereby opening a vast area to white settlement.

Which Way the West?

With notable exceptions, most Indians in the Ohio country and Great Lakes eventually, sometimes reluctantly, sided with Britain during the American Revolution because Americans proved themselves unable to provide the Indians with the trade goods they needed to survive, and, more critically, because white settlers increasingly hunted and squatted on Indian lands north of the Ohio River, their militias burning Indian towns and murdering those Indian leaders among the Delaware and Shawnee who struggled to remain neutral in the conflict. When Britain acceded to American independence by the Treaty of Paris (1783), British negotiators ignored their Indian allies' military control of the Ohio Country, failing to mention the Indian occupants of that territory at all, blithely transferring title to all of their territory south of the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi to the new American republic. Britain's Indian allies reacted first with disbelief and then with fury, considering the transfer the most egregious betrayal, reminiscent of France's transfer of the Ohio country to Britain in that

earlier Treaty of Paris (1763). Ironically, Britain, Spain, and France anticipated that the trans-Appalachian West would continue to be controlled by Indians, acting as a buffer and barrier to the expansion of the rambunctious American republic.

British agents in the Ohio country and Crown officials, such as Quebec's governor Frederick Haldimand, shared their Indian allies' sense of diplomatic betrayal and continued to support Indian aspirations to stop the Americans at the Ohio River by supplying Indians with arms and holding on to key forts in the region. British sympathies for the Indians helped stymie the imposition of American sovereignty on the West, an authority already frustrated by the mountains dividing the West from the Atlantic seaboard and challenged by the uncertain and ambivalent loyalties of western settlers whose commerce was oriented not towards the Atlantic but towards the Gulf of Mexico through New Orleans, a chokepoint to trade controlled by the Spanish. Western leaders, some bribed by Spain, openly proposed sifting their allegiances to Spain or separating from the United States, and establishing their own independent republics. The success of the Revolution, therefore, required the creation of a republic capable of winning the loyalties of western settlers by securing rights of trade for them through Spanish New Orleans. Integrating the new nation with its western possessions also required imposing military supremacy in the Ohio country, subduing Indians who refused to accept British cession of their territories to the Americans as well as the West's "white savages" who squatted on Indian lands and provoked Indian hostilities. In the estimation of Federalist leaders, such as President Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox, Indians and poor whites were twin threats to national order, stability, and unity.

The Western Confederacy

After the Revolution, militant Algonquin Indians in the Ohio River and Great Lakes region, beset by white trespassers and raids by settler militias, revived a Western Confederacy, an intertribal alliance to coordinate their efforts to assure that the Ohio River became the unconditional boundary between Indian country and the American republic, a boundary earlier defined by the Treaty of Fort

Stanwix (1768) in which Sir William Johnson and the Iroquois, those overlords of the Covenant Chain, had forced the Shawnee and Delaware to surrender Kentucky to white squatters and land speculators. Undergirding the Western Confederacy was a nativist, pan-Indian ideology, a conviction that all Indians, despite past intertribal warfare and animosities, shared a racial identity, common ways of life, a communal landscape, and a common enemy in the Americans, whose aggressions could be halted not only by intertribal military cooperation but also by rejecting white religion and culture and by practicing native rituals and ceremonies, new and old, that would assure them the "sacred power" necessary to master their collective destiny. Making their headquarters at The Glaize, a multi-ethnic, largely Algonquin, refugee village on the Maumee River inhabited by Indians of many tribes fleeing settler militias, the militants, led by Little Turtle of the Miami, Buckongahelas of the Delaware, and Blue Jacket of the Shawnees. These militant leaders inveighed against accommodating chiefs who signed the Treaties of Fort Stanwix (1784), Fort McIntosh (1785), and Fort Finney (1786), treaties conveying to the Americans Indian lands spanning nearly all of present-day western New York, Pennsylvania, and eastern Ohio. The Ohio Company quickly laid out towns and farmsteads on ceded Indian lands in eastern Ohio, lands granted by the federal government, the result of a series of congressional land policies, culminating in the Northwest Ordinance (1787), policies which were designed to create a national market for western lands and a constitutional framework for national expansion.

The illusion of the republic's leaders that they could easily assert their "rights of conquest" in the Ohio country through military means was wiped away in October 1790 when the forces of the Western Confederacy, largely Delawares, Miami, and Shawnees under the brilliant leadership of Little Turtle, smashed an invading army of federal troops and settler militias, led by General Josiah Harmar, hurling the defeated Americans back to the Ohio River. The humiliation of "Harmar's Defeat" was repeated in 1791 when the Western Confederation crushed an even larger army led Arthur St. Clair, governor of the newly minted Northwest Territory, inflicting one of the worst defeats of the U.S. Army at the hands of American Indians, making the Western Confederacy the dominant

military power in the region. At a large intertribal meeting in October 1792 at The Glaize, the Confederacy in consultation with Ojibways and Ottawas renewed their demand for an Ohio River boundary. With the renewal of its war with France in 1793 and the threat of war with the United States, Britain reopened a stream of arms, supplies, and military support to the Western Confederacy, building Fort Miami near the insurgent Indian towns, and renewing their alliance with the Shawnees, Delawares, and Miami.

Frustrated and desperate, President Washington and Secretary of War reorganized the U.S. army as the "Legion of the United States," expanding its numbers, placing the intrepid General "Mad Anthony" Wayne in command and moving the force to Fort Washington near Cincinnati, all the while seeking to resolve their Indian troubles through less expensive diplomacy and negotiation. Diplomacy began to crack the Confederacy when a delegation of Potawatomi, Peorias, and Kaskasias from the Illinois country signed the Treaty of Vincennes (1792), met with Washington in Philadelphia and made peace. Fearing defeat, Little Turtle, argued for peace negotiations, confronted as he was by Wayne and his Legion, slowly and methodically advancing deeper into Indian country, building forts and burning Indian towns and crops. The Confederacy removed Little Turtle from command, replacing him with Blue Jacket, when the Miami chief refused to engage the Americans further after leading a disappointing raid on an American supply train outside Fort Recovery,.

In the summer of 1794, Blue Jacket carefully laid a trap for Wayne's advancing Legion at Fallen Timbers, a tornado-ravaged forest near British-held Fort Miami. Intent on avoiding the medical risk of having food in their stomachs in the event of battle-inflicted abdominal wounds but miscalculating Wayne's advance, Blue Jacket and his warriors had begun their fast a day too early and thus went into battle weakened by hunger. Wayne swept the Indians and their English and French-Canadian irregulars from the battlefield, sending them fleeing for the protection of the British at Fort Miami, only to have the British slam shut the gates of the fort in the faces of their hapless allies rather than risk war with the United States.

The Treaty of Greenville

The Battle of Fallen Timbers rattled Indian confidence in Britain and in themselves. Jay's Treaty with Britain (1794) secured Britain's pledge to evacuate its western forts, once again undercutting Indian resistance, isolating the Indian militants, and providing a powerful argument with which General Wayne employed skillfully to persuade the Confederacy to come to the peace table. In the summer of 1795, over a thousand Indian people gathered at Wayne's former headquarters, Fort Greenville, to negotiate what became, in the words of historian Andrew Cayton, a large public "performance of consent," replete with oratory and ceremony, designed to mediate differences, prevent further conflict, and reach common ground. Because the American negotiators were good republicans wedded to the principles of civic virtue and popular consent, they sincerely believed they could not legitimately govern the Northwest Territory without the Indian's public acceptance of the morality of their conquest and the justice of the new republican order in the Ohio country. The Indians in turn sought to revive at Greenville the arrangements of the Middle Ground, the protocols of fictive kinship dating back to the era of New France, whereby Indians ritually transformed the Americans into generous Algonquin fathers, forcing them to accept the Indians as their children and thereby taking "pity" on them, which meant showering them with gifts and granting them their wishes. The Middle Ground, with its core fictions of paternity, however, was based on the Indians' military capacity to extract compromises from the white man. After their defeat at Fallen Timbers, that capacity was critically reduced, causing patriarchy, in the words of historian Richard White, to become "a metaphor over which the Indians were losing control."

Wayne ostensibly negotiated with a united Confederacy, but in fact he dickered with squabbling and embittered groups of villagers, uncertain about which direction to take in the new era in Ohio country. While Blue Jacket played the role of a reticent onlooker, Little Turtle held his ground, eloquently arguing against acceptance of the large land cessions outlined in the proposed treaty: Speaking of the land to be ceded under the proposed treaty, Little Turtle declaimed that, "The print of my ancestors are everywhere to be seen in this

portion." General Wayne was equally eloquent and persuasive, treating the delegations with great civility and showering them with gifts. Let us wipe "the tears from your eyes ... and the blood for your bodies." he offered, but he offered little more, rebuffing Little Turtle's pleas to maintain the Miami in their villages and lands. Tired and resigned to their defeat, all of the delegates – Delawares, Shawnees, Miamis, Ojibways, Ottawas, Potawatomis, Wyandots, Weas, and Kickapoos, - unanimously approved and signed the treaty. Ninety Indian leaders, representing fifteen tribal groups, affixed their mark to the Treaty of Greenville, including militant Shawnee Blue Jacket and the Delaware Buckongahelas, but Little Turtle withheld his mark for some time after the initial treaty signing but won an unusually large annuity for his Miami as a consequence. The Wyandot Tarhe then rose and announced that by the treaty the signatory Indians "do now and henceforth, acknowledge the fifteen United States of America to be our father, and you will all, for the future, look upon them as such: you must call them brothers no more." The fatherhood that the Americans would choose for the Indians, however, was not the generous, permissive father of Algonquin culture but rather the stern Anglo-American patriarch, one who guided, directed, and commanded his children.

A Profound Loss

Under the terms of the Treaty of Greenville, the Indians ceded an enormous expanse of land, all but the Northeast corner present-day Ohio and significant portions of southern Indiana and Illinois along the Ohio and Wabash Rivers. Furthermore, the United States gained the right to establish military reservations within the remaining Indian territory. In return, the United States promised annual payments of a thousands dollars to the Wyandot, Delaware, Shawnee, Miami, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi and annuities of five hundred dollars to lesser signatory tribes, such as the Eel River, Wea, Kaskaskia, and Kickapoo. These annual payments were to be made to American-recognized tribal leaders who then would distribute them among their people, thereby giving the federal Indian agents great influence over Indian politics and government. The signatory Indians did retain "the liberty to hunt within the territory and

lands which they ceded to the United States, without hindrance and molestation," an empty concession in a landscape that was soon to be dotted with white farmsteads and thinned of game.

Under the terms of the Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790, no sales of Indian lands were to be made without the express authorization of the United States to whom also was granted the exclusive rights of management of trade and diplomacy involving Indians and their lands. The Act became a mechanism for controlling backcountry American land speculators and unscrupulous traders just as treaties and government sanctioned trading houses became for regulating Indians. Because traditional Algonquin chiefs could not command their followers, but rather exercised their authority by persuasion and influence, they came to depend on ever-larger American annuities to distribute to their followers, but Americans demanded further cessions of land in exchange. Anticipating this inevitable erosion of tribal territories, the United States aspired to "civilize" and "settle" the Indians by allowing them under terms of the Treaty of Greenville to convert their annuity payments into grants of hogs, cattle, and farming implements with the intent that the Indians would discard their traditional economy of male hunting, female hoe agriculture and communal landholding and adopt a regimen of intensive male plow agriculture, female housekeeping and domestic crafts, and private property, thereby allowing tribal peoples to survive on a much reduced land base, throwing open former Indian lands to white settlers. This program of imperial benevolence, first formulated by Washington's Secretary of War Henry Knox, was enlarged and expanded under the administrations of Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe.

The followers of the old alliance chiefs – Little Turtle of the Miamis, Four Medals of the Potawatomis, Black Hoof of the Shawnee, Adam Brown, Walking-in-Water, and Tarhe of the Wyandot – were willing to accommodate themselves to the Americans, adopting new agricultural methods and gender roles. But, adopting white ways exacted its price. Many Indian villagers, stressed by the loss of land and traditional identities, drank heavily and fell prey the violence, murder, and poverty that drunkenness engendered, a social disintegration that the village chiefs could neither prevent nor control. From the alcoholism and

despair in the decade following the Treaty of Greenville, however, there arose a new generation of nativist prophets, reformed drunkards, such as the pacifist Handsome Lake of the Iroquois and the militant Shawnee Prophet Tenskwatawa, both of whom preached abstinence, moral and social reform, and advocated the recapture of sacred power through the spiritual reformation and the renewal of rituals. Tenskwatawa and his brother Techumseh became the chief opponents of the federal civilizing program and the reversal of gender and economic roles that adopting white men's ways entailed. Undaunted by the defeats that the Treaty of Greenville represented, militant Indians heeded the call to revival and regrouped under the leadership of Tecumsah and Tenskwatawa, sought support among their former Creek and Cherokee allies in the South, and renewed a defense of their lands against the designs of the American "Empire of Liberty."

Further Reading:

Harvey Carter, *The Life and Times of Little Turtle: First Sagamore of the Wabash* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1987); Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance; The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745 – 1815* (Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1992). Frederick E. Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman, Peter J. Albert (eds.), *Native Americans and the Early Republic* (Charlottesville and London, University Press of Virginia, 1999); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999); Richard White, *The Middle Ground; Indians Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, U.K. , Cambridge University Press, 1991).

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