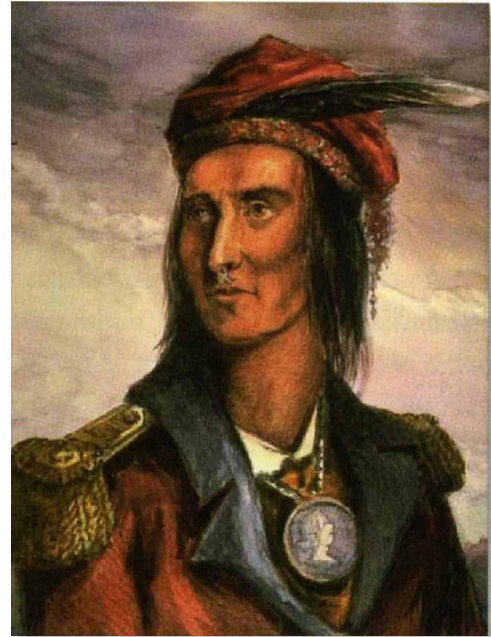


Handout 1 - The Shawnee

Before the arrival of Europeans, the Shawnee lived in the Ohio River Valley, spanning what is today Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Illinois. For centuries they were semi-nomadic agriculturalists and hunters, constructing seasonal villages along the Ohio riverbank. Shawnee society was complex, made up of five political divisions which oversaw multiple tribes and clans spread across many villages. The Shawnee operated markets and exchange networks with other tribes and early European settlers, once they arrived.

Given the Ohio River's strategic importance as a major waterway, Shawnee lands became a battlefield between French and British forces during the French and Indian War (1754–63). As both world powers vied for control over the Americas, the Shawnee somewhat reluctantly allied with the French and fought against the British and their allies, the Iroquois nation. Ultimately, the French surrendered and relinquished its lands in America to the British and Spanish.



Tecumseh

The victorious British made peace with the Shawnee through the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which ensured all lands West of the Appalachian mountains belonged to the tribe. However, American colonists such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry viewed the Proclamation as British interference in American affairs, and pushed into Shawnee held lands nevertheless. A series of conflicts erupted between Shawnee and the colonists, the largest of which was the Battle of Point Pleasant in 1774. During the battle, the Shawnee, under the leadership of Cornstalk, failed to hold back a West Virginian militia intent on expanding the colonies. Cornstalk signed a peace treaty which further diminished Shawnee lands, and a few years later, was murdered along with his son by American militiamen while on a diplomatic mission.

Cornstalk's murder heightened tensions between the Shawnee and the American colonists. Thomas Jefferson, then governor of Virginia, oversaw frequent raids into Shawnee territory. America's newfound independence in 1783 only further emboldened colonists in their bloody expansion westward, as they felt England's defeat allowed them to claim ownership of all lands west of the colonies. Despite attempts to forge confederacies among the various tribes, the Shawnee continued to lose ground to settlers who burned their villages and crops to make room for themselves.



Tenskwatawa

In July 1787, Congress issued the Northwest Ordinance, the first step to expanding the nation westward by adding new states. With the establishment of states like Ohio, the Shawnee were quickly overwhelmed by new settlers. President Jefferson took office in 1801 with a passion for land expansion and the steadfast belief that Native Americans were a “problem” to be solved in the process. Jefferson supported several methods of expansion. In an 1803 communication, Jefferson detailed a plan to confiscate lands through debt manipulation, stating, “ we shall push our trading uses and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them run in debt... We observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands.” Later in his second term, Jefferson supported a policy of forced assimilation through which Native Americans might become “American” and give up tribal living and lands altogether. Jefferson’s tone also grew more stark; he warned a

group of Native American leaders in 1809 that U.S. forces were ready to, “extirpate from the earth or drive to such a distance as they shall never again be able to strike us” any who might physically resist such policies.

Some, who had heard threats such as Jefferson’s, and had seen enough to know they were not empty, made attempts to abandon traditional ways of life and assimilate in the Euro-American society. Other Shawnee, however, refused to assimilate. Most famous among these were the brothers Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh. Fiercely proud of their heritage, the two spoke out against tribal chiefs who sold their lands for personal enrichment. With Tenskwatawa acting as a spiritual leader and Tecumseh acting as a military strategist, the two traveled throughout the Ohio river valley encouraging various tribes to retain their ancestral homelands, resist the calls or urges to assimilate to European culture, and to return to traditional Native American lifestyles.

In their travels, Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh forged a confederacy, and an army, of more than two dozen Indian nations, all of whom spoke different languages and had varied cultural traditions. They then allied their force with the British against the U.S. at the outbreak of the War of 1812, in return for the promise that England would return ancestral lands upon victory. Though Tecumseh’s forces won several early battles, he was killed and his men defeated by the American army of William Henry Harrison in 1813.

The Americans defeated the British, and over the next 20 years more than 100 treaties resulted in the westward relocation of Indian Tribes. The Indian Removal Act, signed into law by President Andrew Jackson in 1830, resulted in a forced resettlement of more than 15,000 Natives of the American Southeast. As many as one-third of those people perished on the journey, which is now known as the “Trail of Tears.”