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Road to Ruin: Elias Boudinot and the Internal Conquest of the Cherokee Nation

Sarah Scott

University at Albany, 2019

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Our story ends on June 22, 1839 in Park Hill, Oklahoma. Three men approached the Boudinot household. Inside were Elias Boudinot, his second wife, Delight Sargent, and their six children (from Boudinot's first marriage). The men lured Boudinot outside, asking him to get medicine from a doctor who lived at a mission a quarter mile from the home. Boudinot obliged but never made it; he was violently murdered several yards from his home, his yells alerting nearby workers. Boudinot was found alive with one stab wound to his back and seven blows from a hatchet to the head. His condition quickly deteriorated and by the time his wife, Delight and friend, Dr. Samuel Worcester arrived on the scene, Boudinot was breathing his last breath, bloody and unresponsive.

Generally, scholars use this moment to end the story of the Cherokee Nation: acculturated to degree, victims of the Trail of Tears, and homeless in Oklahoma. For their stories, less focused on women, they look at Elias Boudinot's body, lying dead on the grass. They see the political, economic, and social ramifications of the civilizing mission. What those scholars seem to miss will be my intervention in the history. Behind Boudinot's body, past the lawn, was a home. If Boudinot was an example of the civilizing mission, his home represented the effects of the internal conquest on the Cherokee nation. With Elias Boudinot as the head of the household of internal conquest, his role as a conqueror becomes clear.

Essentially what I mean when I use the term internal conquest is that the Cherokee Nation was taken down from within, with colonists, missionaries and the United States government acting as external influences during different periods of post-contact Cherokee history. They encouraged new economic systems, gender roles, and political establishments. That being said, members of the Cherokee Nations, specifically

males who would benefit from the new patriarchal society, adopted these ideas. In this paper, I will specifically look at Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee man who grew up in an elite family, went to various missionary schools, converted to Christianity, and signed off on legislation that would ultimately lead to the erosion of women's power as well as the deaths of four thousand Cherokee on the Trail of Tears. He was everything the United States hoped a Cherokee would be, and due to his status in society and position as editor of the only newspaper in the Nation, his acculturated ideas were widespread and respected. Although not single-handedly, Boudinot was able to reconstruct traditional Cherokee society.

To me, internal conquest can best be studied by analyzing the changing role of women in the Cherokee Nation, from before contact to that fateful night in Oklahoma. I will be looking at three facets of Boudinot's home that show the greatest amount of variation from tradition: property and economics, cultural gender roles, and the legislation that transformed what it meant to be Cherokee. In my thesis, I will prove that many Cherokee women were the victims of internal colonization at the hands of their male counterparts who desired more power.

In terms of the historiography, my paper sits at a crossroads between Cherokee women and Elias Boudinot. According to my research, if the historiography were mapped out onto a Venn diagram, there would hardly be an overlap. One book that could be in the center is *To Marry an Indian: The Marriage of Harriett Gold and Elias Boudinot in Letters, 1823-1839*. While the book itself rarely mentions Boudinot in relation gender roles, the idea is implicit in the letters themselves. To address the

otherwise disconnectedness in the historiography, I will split my brief discussion into two parts: one that focuses on Boudinot, and another that focuses on Cherokee women.

Boudinot has been mentioned in nearly every book written on the Cherokee Nation, especially when the topic is related to removal or the Trail of Tears. For example, Jonathan Filler's thesis argues for Boudinot's rationality in favoring removal, while others write about corrupt judgement. The books I used most when writing my thesis were *Elias Boudinot, Cherokee and His America* by Ralph Henry Gabriel and *Cherokee Editor* by Theda Perdue. The first is a biography, which explores early Cherokee culture and Boudinot's life. The latter is a collection of articles from the "Cherokee Phoenix" written by Boudinot, which the author uses to prove that the man was a product of colonization. Unlike the writers who neglect Boudinot's obvious opinions towards womanhood, I will be placing them in the forefront. I would argue that Boudinot's opinions of women does nothing but strengthen the narrative of acculturation. It shows the distance between the man and his society's *traditional* values: the respect of women's power and their significant roles in the community.

Most of the early literature on the Cherokees ignores women altogether; this is a common theme throughout history. Because of this, writing about those women can be difficult. Fortunately, several authors have begun to cover the topic of Cherokee women before removal to Oklahoma. William McLoughlin, author of *Cherokees and Christianity* among other books on the subject, argues for a declension model. To him, Cherokee women were culturally transformed by the actions of the American civilizing mission. They accepted the American ideals and therefore dramatically changed what it meant to be a Cherokee woman. Theda Perdue, the foremost scholar on Cherokee women,

counters that the women did not just change their entire culture to fit the demands of the civilizing mission. Instead, she makes the claim that they *persisted*. Perdue's book, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Cultural Change, 1700-1835* portrays not the destruction of women, but their perseverance during such a time when their very right to be equals in society was called into question. I believe that there is truth in both McLoughlin's and Perdue's models. McLoughlin is correct in saying that the role of Cherokee women was transformed and women lost a great deal of their power. Evidence supports that they were stripped of their political voice, economic prowess, and bodily autonomy. However, this did not negate their ability to maintain their lives and adapt to what Americans said was "civilized". Even as these women faced tremendous hardship, they adopted and manipulated these new concepts to promote previous ways of living. Some even spoke against it outright. As Nancy Shoemaker refers to them, Cherokee women were "negotiators of change". Change did occur, but not completely without their input.

It is important to note that while I say Cherokee Women, I am referring to a large group of them, but not all. At this time, the elite had emerged (for numerous reasons that will be discussed later) and not all of those wealthy, Christian women protested the change. Some of them quietly accepted, leaving the agricultural sphere to take on the role of housewife. However, I will say that this group was not a large majority and most women fell between acculturated and the traditional.

By writing this thesis, I am hoping to bring women further into the narrative as well as portray the importance of internal colonization when it comes to transforming a society. Too many times have females been forgotten in the annals of history,

regardless of how vital they were to the story. In proving Cherokee women's relationship to removal, I hope to make their struggles and persistence known. Unfortunately, the past has not been kind to women; they are often written out. Because of this, historians must read history against the grain and look for mentions of women through the eyes of men, hence my emphasis on Elias Boudinot. His significance in this story of women proves my point regarding colonization. Boudinot was everything the United States, missionaries, and colonists would have wanted in a Cherokee. They acted as external influences, transforming Boudinot. In turn, he weakened the very foundations the Cherokee Nation was built on. This made removal and acculturation that much easier. In using Boudinot's home as a symbol for conquest and transformation, I will be able to display the major changes faced by the Cherokee as well as draw Elias Boudinot and his role in conquest into the story I am telling.

Property

In switching focus from the lawn to the home, the first thing that will strike the reader is the building itself. At the time of the assassination, Elias Boudinot's home was not yet finished. He moved with his family and other signers of the Treaty of New Echota to Oklahoma in 1837. Although I can find no pictures or drawings of the house, its physical image does not concern me. The symbolic significance of the Boudinot home addresses change in traditional Cherokee society that directly correlates to women's power. However, to speak of these changes, one must first discuss what

property looked like to early Cherokees. To do this, I will focus on three transformed aspects: communal property rights, farming, and genders tie to land ownership.

Before outside intervention, Cherokee women controlled property. Their role as economic producers allowed them this power, as property was considered the home and the land that was farmed. A woman did not own the land individually though. She shared it with her mother's family and other people of her clan. Eventually, a daughter would inherit her mother's land, then her daughter and so forth. Men played little role in this property system. If they married a Cherokee woman, they would move into her ancestral home and be integrated with her clan. Change to this structure happened slowly and undermined women's power in the Cherokee Nation.¹

The Cherokee as a whole maintained a harmonious balance with nature, believing they would be punished for any imbalance. According to traditional Cherokee society, air, water and land could not be bought, sold or traded. This would lead to misunderstanding with European settlers in the future and a debate over what it meant to own property.

In the 16th century, Europeans began to encroach on Cherokee land, hoping to set up trading posts. With this, came the deerskin trade, which revolutionized the nation. Cherokee men saw how profitable the deerskins could be and introduced the trade into the community. This brought greater influence to Cherokee men, as they made a majority of the profit from trading. Women only produced corn and double weave baskets. Although they sold, it was not as lucrative as men's products. In exchange for

¹ Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

furs and hides, the traders introduced the Cherokee Nation to manufactured goods, such as guns, knives, and traps.

The introduction of the deerskin trade affected Cherokee property greatly. It depleted food sources, encouraged intermarriage between Cherokee women and white settlers, and began Euro-American involvement in the Cherokee Nation. Over-hunting ran rampant throughout Cherokee land after men realized that they could turn a profit from deerskins. This was exacerbated as the Cherokee traded for goods that increased their efficiency while hunting. The game supply quickly ran low which meant the Cherokee had to expand their hunting grounds or face a lack of food. It also rejected a feature of early Cherokee society: balance. The hunters caused an imbalance in nature and were therefore punished with hunger.

In addition to this, many white settlers began infringing on the nation. They offered relief to the food issue began by the deerskin trade, while making attempts to gain sought-after property. In the eighteenth century, traders advanced European agriculture, encroaching on Cherokee women's roles. Settlers brought domesticated animals like pigs and cattle, as well as new agricultural methods. This introduction may not have been intentional but it originated at a vulnerable time for the Cherokee. Finally, those same settlers began to marry Cherokee women in an attempt to gain their land. Although women ultimately kept their land, their white husbands used it to teach the Cherokee a new manner of cultivation. The intrusion of early settlers in the Cherokee nation began a cycle of acculturation through property change. Cherokee women, who once harvested the land, lost some prestige in the community as the ways in which the land was cultivated evolved.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, the United States government began a civilizing mission with the several Native American Tribes, using property as a main tenet. According John Locke's original statement, all men deserved the right to life, liberty and property. Although Thomas Jefferson changed the phrase to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the meaning remained nearly the same. All men should be able to achieve wealth and status in the newly formed United States.

It was Henry Knox who first suggested the federal government as an agent of civilization. He deplored the actions of European settlers who had decimated Native American tribes and believed that teaching Native Americans how to be civilized would allow them to live happier lives and prolong their existence. While others believed that civilization could be achieved through conversion and education, Knox advocated for teaching the Native American individual property, offering, "Were it possible to introduce among the Indian tribes a love for exclusive property, it would be a happy commencement of business."² To do this, Knox suggested gifting Native Chiefs or their wives with livestock.

Cherokees accepted this plan in 1791 with the Treaty of Holston. According to this Treaty, the United States and the Cherokee Nation would remain on peaceful terms, with the federal government supplying the Cherokee with the materials necessary to become farmers and shepherds. Article XIV reads as such:

That the Cherokee nation may be led to a greater degree of civilization, and to become herdsmen and cultivators, instead of remaining in a state of hunters, the United States will from time to time furnish gratuitously the said nation with useful

² Henry Knox to George Washington, July 7, 1789.

implements of husbandry, and further to assist the said nation in so desirable a pursuit, and at the same time to establish a certain mode of communication, the United States will send such, and so many persons to reside in said nation as they may judge proper, not exceeding four in number, who shall qualify themselves to act as interpreters.³

This Treaty would radically transform the Cherokee nation and lead to a miscommunication between the government and the Cherokee. Women believed that it was their duty as the primary farmers to take care of animal husbandry. Because of this belief, Cherokee women thought the government was validating their purpose and civility. This was contrary to the conclusion of the federal government, which wanted the Cherokee to become civilized through traditional European gender roles; men must raise livestock and farm while women practiced the domestic arts.

In a letter presented to the Cherokee Nation on August 29, 1796, Washington wrote, "The game with which your woods once abounded, you now find to be growing scarce; & you know when you cannot meet a deer or other game to kill, that you must remain hungry...without other instruments for tilling the ground than the hoe, you will continue to raise only scanty crops of corn. Hence you are sometimes exposed to suffer much."⁴ Like Knox, the President recognized the deteriorating condition of the Cherokee Nation and encouraged them to adopt more 'civilized' methods of production in order to

³ The Treaty of Holston, 1791.

⁴ "From George Washington to Cherokee Nation, 29 August 1796"
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-00897>

prolong their existence. Among Washington suggestions were to end hunting, become farmers, raise domesticated animals, and own individual plots of land.

According to Wilma Dunaway, author of *Rethinking Cherokee Acculturation*, the plan to bring agrarian capitalism and individual property rights to the Cherokee Nation harmed women in three ways: “it shifted control of households, land, and the means of production to men; triggered public policies that disempower women; and engendered a new "cult of domesticity" to rationalize the inequitable treatment of wives.” The proposed plan would take away a great deal of power from women, specifically in terms of their control over land.

Agrarian capitalism refers a system that uses agricultural production and domestic manufacturing as a means of defining wealth. It was first introduced in Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). In the book Hopeful Christian civilizers believed that men would take the helm of agricultural production from women so that the females could invest their time in domestic pursuits. For men, this meant planting, plowing, and cultivating crops as well as raising livestock. Traditionally, men had no part in these activities.

Along with agrarian capitalism came the ideas of individualism and private property rights. Previously, clans held Cherokee lands communally and farmed as a collective. When Europeans first came to the Cherokee nation, they were shocked by Cherokee traditions for several reasons, the most obvious being the empowered role of women. Many Europeans operated under the law of coverture. After marriage, a woman had no legal existence separate from her husband. Her property became his and would

never be given back unless granted by the husband. This would have been laughable for the Cherokee who gave all land rights to women.

In addition to female empowerment, there was also a controversy over profit and land rights. For the most part, Cherokees were not trying to profit from their land or their harvest. They were sustaining a society, Cherokee generally did not trade for more than they needed, or hunt for more animals than necessary to feed the clan. Settlers found issue with this ideological difference and matters were exacerbated by the argument over individual versus communal property. To the Europeans, privately owned property was the foundation of the economic system. According to Dr. Shaun Ritenour, “The right to property is absolutely essential for human flourishing, for it is the social institution necessary for the engines of economic prosperity to function.”⁵ By this logic, communal landholding was uncivilized because encouraged sustenance but not to the point of prosperity.

The Cherokees that generally adopted ‘civilized’ agricultural practices like individual landholding were the elites who had previously made their money off of the fur trade. Many of these elites were of mixed-blood ancestry; their fathers or grandfathers had been traders who had married into the Cherokee Nation. One such case of this was Elias Boudinot’s family. His mother, Susanna, was the daughter of full-blooded Cherokee, Nancy Adair and Revolutionary War soldier turned trader, Charles

⁵ Shaun Ritenour. “Three Reasons Private Property Is Essential for Human Flourishing,” *Institute for Faith, Work, and Economics*, Aug. 6, 2014, <https://tifwe.org/private-property-and-human-flourishing/>

Reese. In the late 1700s, Boudinot's family emerged as part of the Cherokee elite and adopted western agricultural techniques and beliefs easily.

Elias Boudinot's father, Oo-Watie, and his uncle, Major Ridge, took advantage of the civilizing program and moved to what is now Calhoun, Georgia. Oo-Watie cleared fields, planted an orchard, and built a log cabin where his family could live. About twenty years later, Elias Boudinot would do the same for his family, although he lacked the funds his father had. Boudinot arrived in Oklahoma bankrupt; he had to ask for a loan from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to build his home in Park Hill. Moving his six children from his first marriage, Boudinot followed in his father's footsteps, trying to build a new life and a new home that strayed from the values of traditional Cherokee society. The land itself was owned individually and by a man nonetheless, it lacked a farm to sustain the community, and his wife's family was nowhere in sight. Boudinot had easily adopted acculturation, whether or not he realized the power he gained in terms of property had been taken from Cherokee women.

Overall, the transformation of Cherokee property is reflective of a larger issue. Settlers who invaded the Cherokee Nation took to civilizing through property. They wanted farming techniques to be European, land to be owned individually, and male dominance in agriculture. Each of these steps took power away from Cherokee women. By the early 1800s, Elias Boudinot came to embody this shift. He encouraged the American civilizing mission by following the tenets fastidiously and preaching them to other Cherokee. This marks him as an actor of internal colonization.

Gender

To explore the concept of internal colonization more in depth, we must travel inside the home to study Boudinot's relationship with the women in his life compared to gender relations in traditional Cherokee Society. The biggest conflict between the two was arguably in the belief system. The Cherokee had their own beliefs and creation myth whereas Boudinot was raised by the teachings of Christianity. He helped bring Christianity to the Cherokee Nation through missionary work and articles in the "Cherokee Phoenix".

According to James Mooney of the Bureau of Ethnology, the first man to record the Cherokee creation story, the world was created and populated with animals. Soon after, the people were made; among them were Selu (Corn) and Kana'ti (the Lucky Hunter). They had one son who was never named. The family lived at a place called Pilot Knob and had everything they could need. Each day, Kana'ti would go into the woods and bring back game. His wife would clean it in the river by his house and gather corn. While Kana'ti hunted and Selu gathered, their son would play by the river. This already establishes the role of both men and women in the Cherokee Nation. Men were responsible for hunting, whereas women care for agriculture and the family. A sense of balance⁶ is created in the creation myth. Men and women perform their duties, which rarely interact with one another. The rhetoric of balance is a far cry from the theme of male dominance showcased in the biblical story of Adam and Eve.

⁶ The idea of balance should not be equated with equality. There were times when women had more power than their male counterparts and vice versa. Ultimately it only mattered that the scales evened out.

According to the bible, Eve was made from Adam's ribs, already tying woman to the idea that they could not exist without men. Even more so, God created Eve because he believed Adam needed a companion.⁷ By this logic, women were only created for men's purposes. Furthermore, it is Eve who is blamed for committing the first sin. When she and Adam are removed from the Garden for eating the forbidden fruit, God commands, "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."⁸ Through the Christian creation story, it becomes clear to see that women were created to be subservient to men in all aspects of life. Unsurprisingly, missionaries who came to the Cherokee Nation brought these patriarchal ideas with them, hoping to force Cherokee women in submission through religion and social reform.

The reform movement most closely tied to religious and social reform was the Cult of Domesticity, which worked to put women in the household where whites believed women should be. According to Barbara Welter, an academic from Hunter College, "True Women" were those who followed the four cardinal rules of womanhood: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.

The first tenet of the culture was piety. It was expected that women be religious; that is was natural for them to already have that state of mind. Some claimed that religion made women happy and gave them dignity. If a woman did church work, it would not take her from her duties at home like joining a society would. On the contrary, female irreligion was seen as unnatural and disgusting. To be "a true woman", above all else, a woman had to be pious.

⁷ This can be seen in parallels to the Christian missionaries in the Cherokee nation at the time. Men were the main missionaries whereas their wives could only be assistants.

⁸ Genesis 3:16

Next on list is purity. Without it, Barbara Welter writes, a woman is not a woman at all. A Euro-American woman had no right to sexual freedom the way Cherokee women did. They were expected to remain virginal until their wedding night when they would bestow their “greatest treasure upon their husband.”⁹ From that point on, a woman would be completely dependent upon her husband. Her husband of course, would not be held to the same standards. He could sin as much as he liked (although it was frowned upon) but if a woman were to do the same she would be accused of “premature prostitution.”¹⁰ According to the language of the flowers, symbolized by a dried white rose, death was preferred over impurity.

Of the four tenets, submission was the most feminine. Men were expected to be religious and pure, although it was perhaps more of a guideline than a requirement. However, man should never submit. Men were superior to women and that was the natural order. If a woman were to be in a dominant position in any aspect of life, she would be upsetting the natural order of the Universe.

The final point of the cult of true womanhood was domesticity. A woman belonged at home to perform her duty as a wife and mother. She had to create a welcoming and cheerful environment to prevent her husband and sons from seeking refuge elsewhere. In their role in the household, women were required to be nurses as

⁹ Barbara Welter. “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 152.

¹⁰ Barbara Welter. “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966):

well. Some men even believed that a woman was at her happiest when tending to her sick husband because it made her feel useful.

The cult was closely tied to religion, and stemmed from Christian ideals of womanhood based in the bible. “Instead of viewing men and women as balancing one another, Euro-Americans regarded gender, like the rest of creation, as hierarchal, with women subservient to men.”¹¹ Although Cherokees and Euro-Americans agreed that women and men were different, there was an argument to be had over how to treat those differences. The Cherokee saw the genders as complementary, controlling different spheres of life, but each was as important as the other. On the contrary, Christians had the genders ranked, with men always at the top. Unlike the genders in Cherokee society, Christian men and women’s spheres of influence were not supposed to interact interact. Women were supposed to be removed from the dirtiness that plagued the men’s world. Many authors and critics have tied this negative view back to the Christian creation story, especially in terms of how it contrasts with the Cherokee creation story.

The change that occurred in the Cherokee nation began in the mid eighteenth century. The first missionaries to come to the Cherokee Nation were the Moravians. They established the inaugural mission in the Cherokee Nation during the late eighteenth century. The Moravians, especially the Gambolds, were kind to the Cherokee but they did not always see eye to eye. In their diaries, the missionaries would write about certain Cherokee practices that they did not approve of such as

¹¹ Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 62.

sports, medicine, or traditional religious practices. Like other missionaries the Moravians could be patronizing and believed in white superiority over the Cherokees. When the first Moravians came to the Tennessee area, the Cherokee leaders were concerned about their presence. The Moravians were given a three-year period to prove that they could better Cherokee life. At the end of the three years, the Moravians had made no converts. Originally, they were supposed to leave but ultimately stayed to open a boarding school. The federal agent assigned to the case knew the Moravians would fail because they placed Christianity over education.¹²

A Presbyterian minister named Gideon Blackburn came in around this time promising to open four schools rather than preach. Blackburn was only able to start two schools in the part of the Cherokee nation that contained a large amount of mixed ancestry Cherokees. The mixed-blood parents did not mind that Blackburn was running a Presbyterian parochial school that required students to memorize Bible verses, pray morning and night, and attend Sunday services. That being said, many full-blood Cherokee did not appreciate Blackburn's attempt. They did not understand the language classes were being taught in nor did they want to be converted. Blackburn's downfall came as he began to meddle in politics¹³. He encouraged Cherokee mixed-bloods to Christianize the nation through a series of laws that attacked women's rights. Among these suggested laws were, "laws to outlaw polygamy, birth control, and

¹² At the time, the Cherokee were more concerned with educating their children than converting them.

¹³ McLoughlin, William G. *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870: Essays on Acculturation and Cultural Persistence*, eds. by Walter H. Conser, Jr. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), 21.

matrilineal inheritance, and laws to enforce Christian marriage, paternalism in the home, in the observance of the Sabbath.”¹⁴ Blackburn believed he was, “single-handedly turning the Cherokees into a Christian tribe.”¹⁵ At this point in time, the Cherokee were not acculturated enough nor were the supporters of Blackburn strong enough to pass the laws that would uproot Cherokee tradition. However Blackburn’s ploy does show us the ties between Christianity and the destruction of women’s rights. He believed that by ending matrilineality and outlawing birth control (both which placed power in the hands of women) the Cherokee could become a Christianized society.

In 1808, Elias Boudinot began his Christian education at a Moravian Mission school. He was raised in a culture of Christianity, domesticity, and male dominance. Ten years later, he would be chosen to attend the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut. There, his education consisted of skills such as: classical languages like Latin and Greek, theology, math, and history as well as more practical lessons in blacksmithing and coopering. He would have also been required to farm or perform other manual labor. This would instill in him a Christian work ethic that would bring him far in life as well as teach him a man’s role in agriculture. The Christian component of the school was most prevalent. Each day, students would repeat scripture, pray, and worship. They were being preached the civilizing mission so in turn, they could teach it to others. The Foreign Mission School in Cornwall bred Boudinot to be an actor of

¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

internal colonization. It gave the young man a strong sense of what was “civilized” and sent him back to his home so he could preach it there.¹⁶

Before Elias Boudinot returned to the Cherokee Nation, he met and fell in love with a prominent physician’s daughter, Harriet Ruggles Gold. Their relationship was frowned upon by the community in Connecticut but accepted by Boudinot’s family. The two worked as missionaries across the country, but eventually settled in New Echota, Georgia. There, Boudinot began his newspaper, “The Cherokee Phoenix”. Keep in mind, Elias Boudinot was the editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, meaning it was largely his opinions being circulated through the Cherokee Nation. Although the paper itself was relatively short-lived, it reached much of the nation and about 30% was written in the Cherokee Syllabary.¹⁷ This means that many Cherokee could read and be influenced by Boudinot’s writing

Elias Boudinot did not discuss the role of women often, however, one article does call attention to his views on the opposite sex. In “Who is a Beautiful Woman”, Boudinot answers the titular question with a discussion of domesticity and purity. The first line of the second paragraph reads, “Wherever there is most bosom tranquility, most domestic happiness, there beauty reigns in all its strength.”¹⁸ To the author, a woman is only beautiful if she is demure and domestic. This is a far cry from the Cherokee women of old. They were powerful, and while they did care for domestic issues, their

¹⁶ John Demos. *The Heathen School: A Story of Hope and Betrayal in the Age of the Early Republic*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 35.

¹⁷ Cherokee Phoenix about page

¹⁸ Elias Boudinot, “Who is a Beautiful Woman?” *The Cherokee Phoenix*. (New Echota, GA), Apr. 1, 1829.

responsibilities were much greater than that. Traditional Cherokee women were in charge of land, labor, major political decisions, and the tribal economy. In his article, Boudinot diminishes this role and banishes the woman to fulfilling only one role in society.

As he finishes the article, Boudinot describes the perfect woman once more, calling her "... a creation more honorable to nature and more beneficial to man..."¹⁹ Although it comes at the end of the article, herein lies the author's main point as well as a general goal of white men during the time. Women did not exist to serve their own purposes or wield significant power. In the eyes of many white Christians, a woman was only necessary assuming she could do something to serve a man. This calls back to the Cult of Domesticity and addresses how Boudinot would have approached his own relationships. One can assume that Boudinot's expectations of his wife matched that of his expectations for a beautiful woman.

In a letter to Herman and Flora Vaill on January 5th, 1827, Boudinot says, "I am afraid, that my dear wife does rather more than she ought to."²⁰ His wife, Harriet Gold Boudinot had found that her sewing skills were especially useful to the Cherokee she lived with, considering their new affinity western clothing. She would host quilting bees while Boudinot taught European agriculture to the men, entertain of Boudinot's extended family when they spent time with the couple, and care for the children. He began to worry that she had taken on more responsibility than she could handle.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *To Marry an Indian: The Marriage of Harriet Gold and Elias Boudinot in Letters, 1823-1839*, Edited by Theresa Strouth Gaul, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Although she was doing the duties prescribed to her, Boudinot saw Gold as doing more than a woman should.

Elias Boudinot's second wife, Delight Sargent, lacks the documentation offered by Harriet Gold. One can assume, however, based on the expectations of Gold, that Sargent was given much of the same duties in Oklahoma. On the night of Boudinot's assassination, Delight Sargent was in the home, caring for her stepchildren. After his death, Sargent was quick to bring them to their biological mother's family, free of Boudinot's expectations of her.

Legislation

The final section of this paper explores how Delight Sargent found her role in Boudinot's home, considering prior circumstances in Cherokee inheritance. She was a white woman, with no claim to Cherokee land, married to a Cherokee man, who, theoretically, would also have no claim to the land. Their children, none of who were born from a Cherokee woman, maintained the title of Cherokee. This was a far cry from traditional Cherokee society because it disregards one vital factor: matrilineality.

To some early scholars, the 1830's in Cherokee Country were seen as a period of mass democratization. As more recent scholars have pointed out, this was only true for some. Between the legislation of the mid 1820s and the Constitution of 1839, Cherokee women lost a majority of their rights²¹, including matrilineality and abortion. As clerk of the National Council, Elias Boudinot signed his name on both of these laws, the

²¹ Michael D. Green and Theda Perdue. *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), xv.

first in 1825 and the second in 1826. Both of these laws, to some degree, destroyed women's power. It disabled from making economic decisions as well as rid them of their responsibility as community makers.

Although in the United States abortion is still hotly contested issue, for the early Cherokees it was an economic right. Women, who were in control of the agriculture of the community, were able to decide how many people they could feed based off of that season's harvest. If they decided that they could not afford to have another child to feed, women were able to commit infanticide or abortion. In addition to economic feasibility, it is possible that women committed infanticide to prevent having crippled or deformed children. According to James Adair, a trader who spent a great deal of time with Native Americans in the south, "[it is] remarkable that there are no deformed Indians."²² Theta Purdue asserts that, "Infanticide may have been practiced by the Cherokees as the only acceptable means by which people could control population growth."²³ This power was granted only to the mothers. Any other person committing infanticide was seen as a murderer. However, in 1826, women were stripped of this ability. Brianna Thebold, author of "Settler Colonialism, Native American Motherhood, and the Politics of Terminating Pregnancies", attributes the law to colonial pressure, believing the all male council had made their decisions based off of white expectations of their behaviors.

²² Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 35.

²³ *Ibid.*, 35.

The second law was written in regards to matrilineality. Cherokee women received a majority of their power from their roles as fertile mothers and producers. They enjoyed the sole responsibility for keeping the Cherokee lineage running. As Fay Yarborough writes, "For much of Cherokee history, being Cherokee meant being born of a Cherokee woman."²⁴ Men had little to no control over property and they could not inherit land. They would often marry into the woman's family, live in her mother's household, and take on her clan. He would have no inheritance, but his children would gain their mother's property.

Because having a Cherokee mother was the sole requirement for being a Cherokee, even children born from an interracial relationship was accepted into the community. If the father (in this situation he was usually a white trader) attempted to take his wife (usually a higher class Cherokee)²⁵ and children from their home, the clan would stop him. Clans at this time were the most powerful governing force the Cherokee had. Membership in a clan would give a person protection and rights and the clan itself had judicial function.²⁶ The exclusivity and parental requirements of the clans system gave women the sole power to create more Cherokee; this meant that Cherokee fathers who had children with white woman had no claim to clan membership, therefore his family would have no possessions or protection in the Cherokee Nation.

²⁴ Fay Yarborough, "Legislating Women's Sexuality: Cherokee Marriage Laws in the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 2 (2004): 387.

²⁵ The marriage between an elite Cherokee woman and a fur trader became more common to create strong alliances between the Native Americans and Euro-Americans. The Cherokee look to gain influence with the Euro-Americans.

²⁶ Fay Yarborough, "Legislating Women's Sexuality: Cherokee Marriage Laws in the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 2 (2004): 386.

This created a significant issue in the early 1820s. Elias Boudinot and his cousin, John Ridge had both married white woman while studying at the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall Connecticut. Ridge married Sarah Bird Northrup in the winter of 1824. A year and a half later, Harriet Gold, a daughter from a prominent Cornwall family, wrote to her brother secretly about her planned wedding to “an Indian.”²⁷ Worried by Ridge’s marriage and Boudinot’s engagement, the National Council of the Cherokee Nation created the law protecting the rights of children born from a Cherokee father and a white mother. The law states, “...the children of Cherokee men and white women, living in the Cherokee nation as men wife, be, and they are, hereby acknowledged, to be equally entitled to all of the immunities and privileges enjoyed by citizens descending from the Cherokee race, by the mother side.”²⁸ The legislation put men and women on an equal playing field; a Cherokee could no longer be defined just by being birthed from a Cherokee mother. A Cherokee man could now produce a Cherokee citizen.

In an attempt to save the lineage of the Cherokee elite and appease the United States Government, the National Council disregarded women’s traditional societal power.²⁹ If we look back to the home, we would see six children running around: all Cherokee, but none having a Cherokee mother, biological or step. Both Harriet Ruggles

²⁷ *To Marry an Indian: The Marriage of Harriet Gold and Elias Boudinot in Letters, 1823-1839*. Edited by Theresa Strouth Gaul. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

²⁸ Constitution of the Cherokee Nation

²⁹ Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Gold Boudinot and Delight Sargent Boudinot were white women, mothers to Cherokee children, a phenomenon that would have been unacceptable prior to 1825. Boudinot's marriage to Harriet and his signature under the new legislation paint him as a man willing to destroy hundreds of years of tradition if it were to benefit him. Whether it was unbeknownst to him or not, Boudinot's climb to the top came with a price that Cherokee women had to pay.

Boudinot had done what he thought was best for the Cherokee Nation. He believed that if the Cherokee Nation became acculturated and followed guidelines set out by the United States government and Christian missionaries, they would be safe in Georgia. However, the government was greedy and would not settle for "model Indians", they wanted the land too. In the 1830s, gold was found in Cherokee Territory and removal went from looming on the horizon to an actual reality. For years, Cherokee women had protested removal, but the lack of power they faced in a newly transformed nation meant their cries were not listened to.

In the years 1817, 1819, and 1821[1831?], some Cherokee women exercised the remains of their power, petitioning the National Council to fight removal. In the petition, Cherokee women accepted their acculturated status while simultaneously fighting against Euro-American encroachment. They used traditional rhetoric, invoking their power as mother and owner of the land. In the first petition, written in 1817, the women refer to the council as "Our beloved children and head men."³⁰ The women plea, "your

³⁰ Cherokee Women Petition Removal

mothers, your sisters ask and beg of you not to part with anymore of our land.”³¹ These words harken back to women’s traditional roles as mothers; however, they also recognize the changing power dynamics of the Cherokee Nation. Several lines later, the women write, “Therefore, children, don’t part with any more of our lands but continue on it & enlarge your farms. Cultivate and raise corn & cotton and your mothers and sisters who make clothing for you which our father the president’s recommend to us all.”³² Although the women are petitioning removal, they accept the duties thrust upon them by Euro-American ideals. Although their society has changed around them, women do not want to part with the land. If “acceptance” of their roles was what it took to stay on their native lands, that was what the women would do.

The 1819 Petition once again allows the women to use the settler’s rhetoric and guilt to persuade the Council. They said, “...because it appears to us that we, by this removal, shall be brought to a savage state again, for we have, by the endeavor of Our Father the President, become too much enlightened to throw aside the privileges of a civilized life.”³³ In an appeal to the Council’s sensibilities, the women argue that upheaval and removal will return the Cherokee back into their pre-contact selves: uncivilized and unadvanced. In doing this, the women guilted the council into believing those years of hard work in the civilization program would be wasted by removal.³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Cherokee Women Petition Removal

³⁴ Assimilationist Language in Cherokee Women's Petitions: A Political Call to Reclaim Traditional Cherokee Culture

Written in either 1821 or 1831³⁵, the final petition is the Cherokee Women's last effort to prevent their inevitable removal west of the Mississippi. The women begin their last petition with what seems to be a reference to the United States Constitution. "We the Females," they proclaim, "residing in Salequoree and Pine Log, believing that the present difficulties and embarrassments under which this nation is placed demands a full expression of the mind of every individual..."³⁶. Gone is the earlier rhetoric of the "civilized" Cherokee woman. In its place stood a hint of a traditional Cherokee woman, fighting for her lands and her rights.

Interestingly, the female petitioners were theoretically in direct disagreement with Elias Boudinot's opinions of removal. While the women believed the most important feature of society was the land they had cultivated for hundreds of years, Boudinot put his faith in culture. The women who wrote the petitions may have wanted to stay on their land, but ultimately it was wealthy Cherokee elite men who received what they wanted.

The Significance of Internal Colonization

Elias Boudinot's actions as an agent of internal colonization show how easy it can be for one man to change the course of human events. It also speaks to a larger issue at hand, the role of internal actors in colonization. Using Boudinot as my example,

³⁵ The writing on the original petition is too difficult to discern the actual date, however, the women's use of the phrase, "... the present plan of the General Government to effect our removal West of the Mississippi" makes me believe that it was written in 1831, one year after Andrew Jackson passed the Indian Removal Act, making removal seem like the most likely fate of the Cherokee.

³⁶ Cherokee Women Petition Removal

I would argue that internal colonization leads to a more seamless transition. It is easier for a group of people to listen to someone like them as opposed to an outside force. Whereas a man like Washington or Knox would sound condescending to the Cherokee, Boudinot would come off as a more benign force. He knew what the Cherokee struggled with; he could relate to some of their issues. It would have been far easier for them to accept his authority (as he was already from an elite family) than a white intruder.

Although Boudinot was not the only actor of colonization, he is the most notable. While most scholars neglect his relations to and views on women, this is the most important piece of the puzzle. Women were tied to the land; they held power. By attacking women's rights, Boudinot was able to weaken the foundations the Cherokee Nation stood on, easing not only the acculturation process, but removal as well.

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