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TENNESSEE'S EARLY HISTORY, 1770 TO 1840, IN LIGHT OF FEDERAL PROGRESS

Five major developments in the young American nation strongly influenced the evolution of Tennessee in its early years, 1770 to 1840. First, the new nation's opening up of lands west of the Appalachians resulted in the push of land-hungry migrants from Western Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas through the Cumberland Gap into the eastern valleys and the central basin of Tennessee. Second, settler encroachment on Indian lands and hunting grounds created hostilities that would set in motion an ongoing struggle between natives and whites that would not be resolved in trans-Appalachia until Indian removal in the 1830s. Third, for the whites, ideas of political independence on the national level sparked various democratic actions on the Tennessee frontier which culminated in a reverse impact on the nation via the election of two Tennesseans, Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, to the nation's highest office. Fourth, Tennessee enjoyed limited but successful economic growth as a result of the nation's industrial revolution and the region's burgeoning agricultural boom in response to the textile industry's need for cotton. Fifth, the African-American presence in the nation, the federal enactment against American involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, but the continuation of chattel slavery in the South exasperated the capacity of both the region and Tennessee to assimilate the moral reverberations. Because of this ethical deficiency, the state could not live up to its self-image as genteel society based on a biblical culture. These five trends, which illustrate that Tennessee developed and evolved as an extension of the newly-formed United States, will be discussed in this brief essay.

The French ceding of land east of the Mississippi River by the Treaty of Paris in 1763 at the end of the French and Indian War (Seven Years' War on the Continent) made the immediate trans-Appalachian region a British domain. But England's attempt to placate the Indians and control westward migration with the Proclamation Line met with mixed success. By the early 1770s, settlers wanting less civilization, more freedom, and opportunities based on land ownership had found refuge in northeast Tennessee (i.e., Watauga River, North Holston, Nolichucky, and Carter's Valley). After 1780, tens of thousands of Scotch-Irish, as well as other European immigrants, made their way to the Old Southwest. Several things occurred to make this come about. First, early pioneers like James Robertson, Daniel Boone, and John Donelson had begun small communities that attracted others. They had defended these communities successfully against Indian attacks, and they literally and symbolically threw off the yoke of British overlordship in the Battle of King's Mountain (1780). Second, the federal government took a laissez faire approach toward settlement of the Old Southwest, since it was concerned mostly about possible economic advantages by exploitation of the Old Northwest. This led to rampant land speculation in the Tennessee region, which had some controls, though limited, under Carolina state governance. But, third, the federal government did provide for logical transition of the Old Northwest and trans-Appalachia from wilderness to territory to statehood in the Northwest Ordinance (1780). After North Carolina ceded its western lands in 1789, Tennessee became part of the Southwest Territory in 1790 and won its statehood in 1796 as the sixteenth state of the Union.

Unlike the Indians who used the land for hunting and, especially after European encroachment, for barter and trade, whites intended to stay on the land, own it personally, and live by farming. The permanence of white settlement on the tribes' ancestral lands did not go unnoticed by the Indians. Nor had it gone unchecked without response for many, many decades. In other words, the White Man / Red Man problem was nothing new to either the indigenous tribes or the newly-arrived Europeans who laid claims equally to the land now called the state of Tennessee. But a novel situation existed for Native Americans. For example, the Cherokees, since they allied with the British in the Revolutionary War, no longer could profit from their old benefactors and stood in relation to the United States and its territories as defeated to victor.

For its part, the federal government picked up where colonial authorities left off and made repeated treaties with the tribes or factions thereof. As whites and reds fought each other intermittently, because Native Americans were outnumbered and overwhelmed (i.e., technologically), they could not withstand the advance of the whites. Too, their internal factions did not help their cause. Patterns of resistance had already become fragmented as a result of earlier and ongoing British, French, and Spanish influences. Now the Indians had to face the assault of a United States that was growing and expanding rapidly and pervasively. From roughly 1780 to 1830, major Indian claims in Tennessee were ceded to the federal government through treaties with the Cherokee at Hopewell (1785), Holston River (1791), and Tellico (1798), with Cherokee and Creek in Dearborn's Treaty (1806), and with the Chickasaw at Old Town (1818).

After the War of 1812, the federal government worked to resettle the tribes west of the Mississippi. Sought by speculators who wanted Indian lands, by farmers who feared Indian hostilities, and by missionary groups who wished to "save" the Indians (e.g., from extinction), official removal policies began under Thomas Jefferson, continued under James Madison, and came to fruition with Andrew Jackson who signed into law the Indian Removal Act (1830). In the early 1820s, the Choctaw and Creek signed removal agreements, and part of the Cherokees agreed to removal in the Treaty of New Echota (1835). But some of the Cherokee held out until the federal government forcibly removed them resulting in the infamous Trail of Tears during the winter of 1838-1839. The state's legacy to Native Americans remains significant (e.g., place names alone). Retrospectively, the story of Indian depopulation and removal from Tennessee represents a sad, but climactic, episode in the westward push of progress or modernity under the crushing weight of capitalistic enterprise, liberal democracy, and Christian civilization. For the nation as a whole, though, the story was (and is) far from finished.

Tennesseans' flirtation with independent or non-federated rule (e.g., the state of Franklin, 1785 to 1788) and political alignment with non-British governments (e.g., the Mero district, 1788 to 1809 roughly) reflected both the isolated nature of the trans-Appalachian frontier and the influence of liberal republican ideas (i.e., by Deists and Enlightenment political thinkers) that were popularized during the Revolution. In these early efforts, self-sufficiency in economic matters (e.g., a sure transportation route along the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans, then controlled by Spain) and the government's promise of protection, or lack thereof, loomed

large. At any rate, Robertson's and John Sevier's initiatives fizzled, even though the tradition of stubborn independence, sometimes bordering on rebellion, lingered. This creativity of early Tennesseans in their political savvy might very well be a contributing factor to the nation's movement from republican to democratic type ideas and practices. The whole picture no doubt is much, much bigger than Tennessee. But then, there is Andrew Jackson to consider.

Early on, Governor Sevier and Willie Blount sparred politically at the state level. During the winter of 1796, Blount and other reckless men ran afoul of federal law in their conspiracy to try to take Spanish Florida and Louisiana. This was the sort of brazen independence that had to be reigned in by Blount's expulsion from the U.S. Senate (the House of Representatives also pushed for his impeachment). In his stead, the state legislature chose Andrew Jackson. Jackson really did not rise to fame until after his conquest of the Creeks, his exploits in Spanish Florida, and especially his victory over the British at Mobile, Pensacola, and New Orleans in early 1815. Nationally acclaimed as a result of the battle of New Orleans, Jackson and his supporters profited from the publicity immensely.

A little over a decade later, during the election of 1824, General Jackson got his chance at the national level. The decline of elitism, the desire of artisans, merchants, and yeoman farmers for a greater voice in the affairs of government, and the general leveling effect of growth in commerce and industry led to the demise of the Federalists, the split of the Republicans, and the ascendancy of popular politics and the Democratic Party. At the national level, Jackson had a tough go of it and had to wait until the next election cycle to win the office of Presidency. To the

forefront of national concerns, Jackson brought his oft contradictory anti-federalist philosophy (especially in relation to banking, commerce, and the federal judiciary), his strong desire to resettle the Indians west of the Mississippi, and his determination to disallow the politics of slavery to break apart the Union (e.g., in response to South Carolina's nullification of the Tariff of 1828). In Tennessee, these matters loomed less large at the time, excepting Indian removal, and Jackson transcended regional or Tennessee concerns remarkably well while serving as President for his two terms, 1829 to 1837.

In summary, Jackson brought the roughness, stubbornness, and brashness of the Tennessee frontier to Washington. And it was more than just his style. Nonetheless, Jackson in his own person represented a much smaller spectrum of the populace than his supporters led the nation to believe (i.e., slave-owning, landed aristocracy). But just like President James K. Polk some twelve years later, Jackson vigorously pursued policies that favored the country's growth through westward expansion.

Economically, after the opening of Nashville Bank in 1807, the state prospered from the growth of commerce and steady but relatively slow urbanization (compared with the eastern seaboard and the "industrial" North). Even by the mid-1800s, the state only had two urban areas that could be called cities (Nashville and Memphis) and a few smaller towns like Chattanooga, Clarksville, Murfreesboro, and Knoxville. But population gains from 100,000 in 1800 (about two percent of the nation's five million) to roughly 800,000 in 1840 (about five percent of the country's seventeen million) provided a resourceful pool of laborers. The state's major economic

focus, as in most of the South, remained agricultural (i.e., production and export of corn and wheat, cotton and tobacco, and livestock). The War of 1812, in which Tennesseans participated heavily, gave the state a great economic boost, but the state like the rest of the country suffered the usual cyclical downturns (the Panics of 1819 and 1837).

Apart from the long-term, devastating impact of cotton and slavery (i.e., agriculturally, economically, and socially), perhaps the greatest contribution of Tennessee to the nation's economic formation and the South's agricultural prowess came with development of transportation routes in the region. The railroads, which were to play a significant role in the South's economy and the logistics of the Civil War, did not come to Tennessee in a big way until the 1850s. But shipping by water and travel overland made important strides in Tennessee in the early antebellum period. The first settlers had relied on old Indian trails such as Avery and Natchez traces and natural passageways like the Cumberland Gap and the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi Rivers. The application of new technologies (e.g., steam power to boats and macadamized materials to turnpikes and roads) enhanced these passageways, eased the strains of travel and shipping, and shortened transit times considerably. In this way, the central and western parts of Tennessee functioned as an important conduit from the eastern seaboard, the Piedmont, and the Gulf of Mexico to the heartland of the South. In eastern Tennessee, the lack of unobstructed rivers and roads emphasized its relative isolation from the rest of the state and its independent development agriculturally and socially. Tennesseans in eastern parts of the state increasingly gravitated toward connections in the immediate trans-Appalachian vicinity (e.g., the

Blue Ridge Mountains of Carolina and Virginia) and peripheral regions (e.g., the Piedmont and the coastal plains).

After the removal of the Chickasaw from western Tennessee, whites relocated thousands of African-American slaves to the Mississippi Delta region. This followed a general trend in the South, as migration from soil-depleted coastal plantations and farmlands in the East brought possibly a quarter of a million slaves into Tennessee and the new states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. There the growing of cotton flourished, and export cotton could be shipped more easily along the Mississippi River down to port in New Orleans. Even though Congress had prohibited any American involvement in transatlantic slave trading in 1808, this did not deter southerners and Tennessee slave-owners from breeding and marketing their human chattel on southern soil. In the supply-and-demand game for cotton, planters simply could not resist the economic profits reaped by their exploitation of slaves. What this spawned, however, was a bitter struggle, temporarily "fixed" by the Missouri Compromise in 1820, between Free States and Slave States for control of the federal legislative bodies–a struggle that would rip apart Tennessee and the nation in the 1850s and 1860s. Tennessee naturally sided with the southern, slave-holding states. For the slaves, though, the end of the transatlantic slave trade created an entirely American-born slave population. And migration into the Mississippi Valley removed slaves from their coastal roots and diminished their cultural distinctions (e.g., the speaking of Gullah). This eventually led to the creation of an American black slave culture.

But there were voices of dissent both at the national level and in Tennessee, primarily the eastern part of the state where smaller farms did not depend as heavily on slave labor. Other factors as well contributed to anti-slavery in East Tennessee (e.g., religious and philanthropic beliefs). As early as 1820, Elihu Emree, son of a Quaker minister and one of the first iron makers in East Tennessee, published the first abolitionist paper at Jonesboro called the *Emancipator*. In 1826, Frances Wright started a biracial utopian community, which she called Nashoba, near Memphis. Through common labor and enlightened education she sought to liberate the slaves of Nashoba and then, as a concession to local supporters, resettle the freed slaves in Africa. Ironically, though, Protestant Christianity played a big part in both the approval and denunciation of slavery in the nation and Tennessee.

Sectarian Christianity, mostly by Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, had come to frontier Tennessee with the early settlers. The various Christian sects experienced gains but also new schisms with the outbreak of revivals in the early 1800s. The illusion of greater spirituality, however, did not alleviate the burden of slavery's moral turpitude in the state. Protestant ministers were entrenched in the socio-political matrix of antebellum slave-holding culture, and they were dependent, economically and psychologically, on the goodwill of their congregants or churches in a society that had severed formal connections between the government and any specific Christian establishment. So they found it necessary to conform to the prevailing pro-slavery outlook. For those who disagreed, they had the option to move to a free state, and many did just that. Ultimately, attempts at refinement of slavery to genteel standards simply were not

effective enough to overcome the "peculiar" institution's moral and political implications. Generally speaking, Protestant Christianity in the South and in Tennessee, in its biblical justifications of slavery, failed to disrupt its gross abuses. Protestant Christianity also failed to live up to biblical imperatives in relation to the slaves (e.g., the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount). And Protestant Christianity's neglect to disrupt these abuses rendered it insufficient to educate and truly reform the hardheartedness of its congregants. Unfortunately, it would take a Civil War to undo what decades of abuse of human beings had done and what Protestant Christianity could not, or would not, do.

In summary, these five areas–trans-Appalachian settlement, Indian removal, democratic politics, the cotton boom, and Protestant Christianity's abdication to slavery–define Tennessee's early history, 1770 to 1840, in light of federal progress.