

The choctaw tribe essay

[Art & Culture](#), [Dance](#)



The Choctaw Indians were an important tribe, and the largest of the Muskogean tribes. The Choctaws have two stories about their origins in their traditional homeland in central Mississippi.

One is that their ancestors came from west of the Mississippi River and settled in what is now the homeland. The other is that the tribe is descended from ancestors who were formed by a spirit from the damp earth of Nanih Waiyah, a large mound in northeastern Mississippi. Either way, the Choctaws resided in places, holding most of Southern Alabama and Mississippi with adjoining parts of Louisiana. The Choctaws had a strong tradition of doing business.

They were very intelligent people. The tribe developed a strong economy based on farming and selling goods and livestock to the Europeans who were beginning to venture into the Choctaw territory. They worked mostly as agriculturists, and were preeminently the agriculturists of the Southern Indians. In addition, the Choctaws were known as peaceful people. They were ready to defend themselves when needed, but they seldom initiated warfare against neighboring tribes. The main weakness of the Choctaws was that there were limited choices for their future. There was no recognized tribal government, and very few Choctaws owned land.

It was said that they were the poorest pocket of poverty in the poorest state of the country". There was a lack of educational opportunity, and few schools were open to Choctaw children. There were also poor health conditions. Had there been a decent tribal government formed, these issues could have been dealt with, however it was not until the removal of the Choctaws until a

stable government was formed. The Choctaw tribe is certainly an interesting one.

One of their chief religious ceremonies was a harvest celebration called the Green Corn Dance. At this, among other corn festivals, marriage arrangements were made. In addition, the game of chunky as well as the ball play was extensively practiced by them. Conflicts between villagers, and sometimes with other tribes, were generally settled by sport rather than war. The stickball game (a forerunner of the modern game of lacrosse) pitted teams from different villages against each other.

Winning was a matter not only of skill but of the power of the villages' spiritual leaders to influence the outcome through their prayers and powers. The belief system of the Choctaws was shared beliefs of the tribes of the south-eastern regions of North America. They believed that they emerged from the earth through a mound called Nanih Waiya. The major deity was the sun, a spiritual being whose earthly representative was fire. Another belief of the Choctaws had to do with death. It was their custom to clean the bones of the dead before depositing them in boxes or baskets in the bone-houses, the work being performed by "certain old gentlemen with very long nails," who allowed their nails to grow long for this purpose. The people of this tribe also followed the custom of setting up poles around the new graves, on which they hung hoops, wreaths, etc. As their name seems to imply, they practiced artificial head flattening.

They believed this process would aid the spirit in its ascent. The Choctaws had a very typical style of dress for Native Americans. Choctaw men wore

belts and loincloths, adding moccasins, leggings, and garments from feathers or mulberry bark in winter.

Below their knees, men wore strings of bells they obtained from traders. Women wore short skirts made of deerskin, along with deerskin shawls and moccasins when the weather got cold. They wore decorated garments, earrings, and feathers of bright colors. Both men and women wore face paint and tattoos. As for their hair, men wore their hair long with bangs and braids. Women on the other hand, also had long hair, but wrapped it into a roll on the back of their heads. That pretty much covered the looks and dress of the Choctaws.

Family life was rather simple. Both in Mississippi and later in the West, the Choctaws were farmers whose villages were composed of log houses surrounded by cornfields. Men hunted, and women raised the crops, although men sometimes helped with clearing the fields. Each village had a chief who met with a council of elders and experienced men in a square at the center of the village. The younger men made up the hunters and warriors of the tribe. They defended their territory against the Chickasaw tribe in the north and from the Creeks on the east.

Culturally, the Choctaws have always honored their women as the head of every family household. They were, and still are today, considered the caretakers of our children, our elders, and the home. As for the children, their job should have been just to go to school and get an education, and help around the house when needed. However, there was a lack of educational opportunity and poor health conditions. Few schools were open to Choctaw

children, and most children were needed to work. The families worked primarily as sharecroppers, selling goods and livestock to the Europeans. The Choctaws were known for their removal.

As it started out, the Choctaws were prosperous people with large land holdings which they then had to negotiate over. In 1830, the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek forcibly relocated the entire Choctaw nation from their homeland in Mississippi west to what is now known as Southeastern Oklahoma. Over twenty thousand Choctaws were moved on this long journey. Seven thousand survived this removal on what has come to be called "The Trail of Tears". The Choctaw Nation was the first American tribe to be removed by the federal government from its ancestral home to land set aside for them. Railroads were built over Choctaw land and they were forced to resettle in a different region of the rapidly changing territory. More than 23 million acres were ceded to the United States.

After the removal of the Choctaw Nation, the tribe started a new life in Oklahoma and some other regions. They also adapted to a new form of government by partly modifying to a Euro-American culture, and a new school system. Present Oklahoma Choctaw are found in McCurtain, Pittsburg, Le Flore, and Pushmataha, which in 1945 came to nineteen thousand residing Native Americans. In 1950, there were about three thousand Choctaws residing in Mississippi. In 1970, there was a total of about twenty four thousand Choctaws roaming Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Today, about eleven thousand Choctaw live in Oklahoma and about four thousand live in Mississippi as a separate tribe.

Many Choctaw are farmers or foresters. I learned a great deal about my Indian tribe. I felt that for such good, honest and peaceful people that the Choctaws seemed to be, they were treated horribly.

I really feel sorry that the Indians were treated so harshly, especially as to get their land taken away from them. I give the Choctaw Nation a lot of respect for going through their removal by the Federal Government, and having to start their lives over somewhere new. The tribe overcame their weaknesses by outnumbering them with strengths. They also took initiative to make their new lives in Oklahoma better than in Mississippi.

I feel that this was a very rewarding project, in that I got to learn about the hardships and conflicts this tribe had to go through. It's amazing what people do to save themselves and their heritage, and I've learned this from the Choctaw Tribe.