

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

The Politics of Indian Removal, Creek Government and Society in Crisis.  
By Michael D. Green.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5005b8wn>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 9(2)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Fixico, Donald L.

**Publication Date**

1985-03-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

ground material as context for the narratives. By and large Boyd does a good job of annotating and filling in, but he is capable of some very fusty prose, some of which sounds as if it were written when the Kiowas were still chasing buffalo. "As the Kiowas danced and roamed free amidst nature's bounty, discordant notes arose as the tribe faced the white man's expansion onto the fenceless plains," is probably the worst example.

All in all, however, this is an exquisite and invaluable set of volumes, and Boyd and the Kiowas are to be commended for the job they have done.

*Alan R. Velie*  
University of Oklahoma

**The Politics of Indian Removal, Creek Government and Society in Crisis.** By Michael D. Green. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. 237 pp. \$21.50 Cloth.

Michael Green has authored a political study of the traditional Creek government and its society from 1814 to 1836. During those turbulent years, the Creek Indians found themselves faced with the issues of war against the United States, treaty-making, inter-tribal strife, removal, and the fall of their once powerful confederacy that had dominated a large area in the southeast. The leadership and factionalism in the National Council is analyzed in depth, thereby exemplifying the Creek response to these issues.

The conflict between town leaders involving leaders from the Upper Town division under Big Warrior of Tuckabatchee and the Lower Towns under Little Prince is carefully examined. Both attempted to assert their influence on the National Council for personal gain. In spite of their rivalry and the political ambitions of other leaders, William McIntosh tried to lead the entire tribe as its principal spokesperson. In fact, McIntosh and Big Warrior were also political rivals. Illustrating the prominent and shrewd roles of these Creek leaders is relevant since tribal studies typically focus on the actions between white and Indian leaders.

Focusing on individual Indian leaders who vied for political gain during the early nineteenth century could easily be susceptible to misinterpretation, but this was not the case. The leaders were examined in enough depth, so that one could understand

their motives and obtain insight into their personalities. In this light, tribal politics became the unseen problem that was overshadowed by outside pressures to drive the Creeks from their lands. It is evident that ambitious Creek politicians sought the leadership of the National Council amidst the larger issues of westward expansion and the tribe's growing weakness. Furthermore, the Creek agency became highly politicized, especially under Agents David Mitchell and John Crowell, both of whom attempted to influence the Creeks. This seemingly common plot of white officials intervening in tribal politics is documented as well.

Aside from Creek and white politicians, another pertinent factor contributing to the decline of the Creeks was the differences that developed between the Upper and Lower towns. It is argued that the Lower towns became less traditional as mixed bloods began owning slaves to work their lands and emulating the ways of whites. Hence, the "Lower Creeks lost some of the social cohesion that living closely together had provided, and they became more vulnerable to the undermining qualities of Anglo-American culture" (p. 150). In contrast, the Upper towns were more isolated, enabling white influences to widen the growing chasm between the Upper and Lower towns. Their differences climaxed when the Lower towns signed the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825-26, which ceded most of the Creeks' land to the United States. After this event, the National Council never recovered. The nullification of this agreement, however, and its revised provisions, according to the author, was the central political issue in the Creek government's decline. As a part of this crisis, it was surmised that the turmoil stemming from the tribal execution of William McIntosh, ambitions of power thirsty native leaders, influence of Georgia Governor George M. Troup and an insensitive President John Q. Adams—all contributed to usurping the sovereignty of Creek authority. Moreover, in face of white settler pressure and a developing policy of Indian removal, the Creeks were doomed.

Undoubtedly the National Council was under tremendous pressure. The author stressed that the Council, an "ancient institution," had become outdated for the needs of the Creeks, especially during the early decades of the nineteenth century. In the author's own words, "For the Creek National Council to assume the role of an active, positive, centralized, policy-making and enforcing government was to violate ancient traditions

deeply ingrained and tenacious" (p. 34). As evidence, Charleston epitomized the transfer of Creek dependency to trade relations. And it became clear that the leaders of the Creeks had to increasingly deal with the infusion of Anglo-American culture in Creek society.

The Creeks also found themselves divided between the British and Americans. Pro-British supporters led by the able Creek politician, Alexander McGillivray, headed one faction. Pro-American Creeks were under the influence of Agent Benjamin Hawkins. Factionalism involving the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and other non-Creek conflicts only served to undermine the Creeks. Threatening outside interests and internal strife led to the Creeks' decline, two points well made in this study.

In times of war and crises of high magnitude, democratic governing structures are less efficient and usually require an efficacious one-person leadership to pull them through. Angie Debo in her classical study on the Creeks, *The Road to Disappearance, A History of the Creek Indians*, stressed the importance of leadership during these troubled times. To the Creeks' misfortune, the enormity of the Creek Confederacy's political structure led to its own downfall when its conflict in leadership in the National Council, compounded by each town's interests, could not deal effectively with the serious problems mentioned.

Although the role of the Council may have been overstated, new ground has been broken for historical interpretations of tribal microcosms. Presenting the interactions between Creek leaders might expose this study to criticism, but this insightful work deserves recognition as an endeavor in new historical analysis of tribal studies. Having pored over the appropriate archival documents, an insightful understanding of Creek political behavior, its leaders, and society has been extrapolated.

In the line of other classical works on Indians of the Southeast that have been completed by Grant Forman, Angie Debo, Arrell M. Gibson, and Charles Hudson, Michael Green has contributed a valuable study by adding another dimension to earlier studies. His political analysis of the Creek governing structure and its leadership under fire, is important for understanding the historical tribal politics of one of the most powerful Indian governments in the Southeast.

Donald L. Fixico  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee